

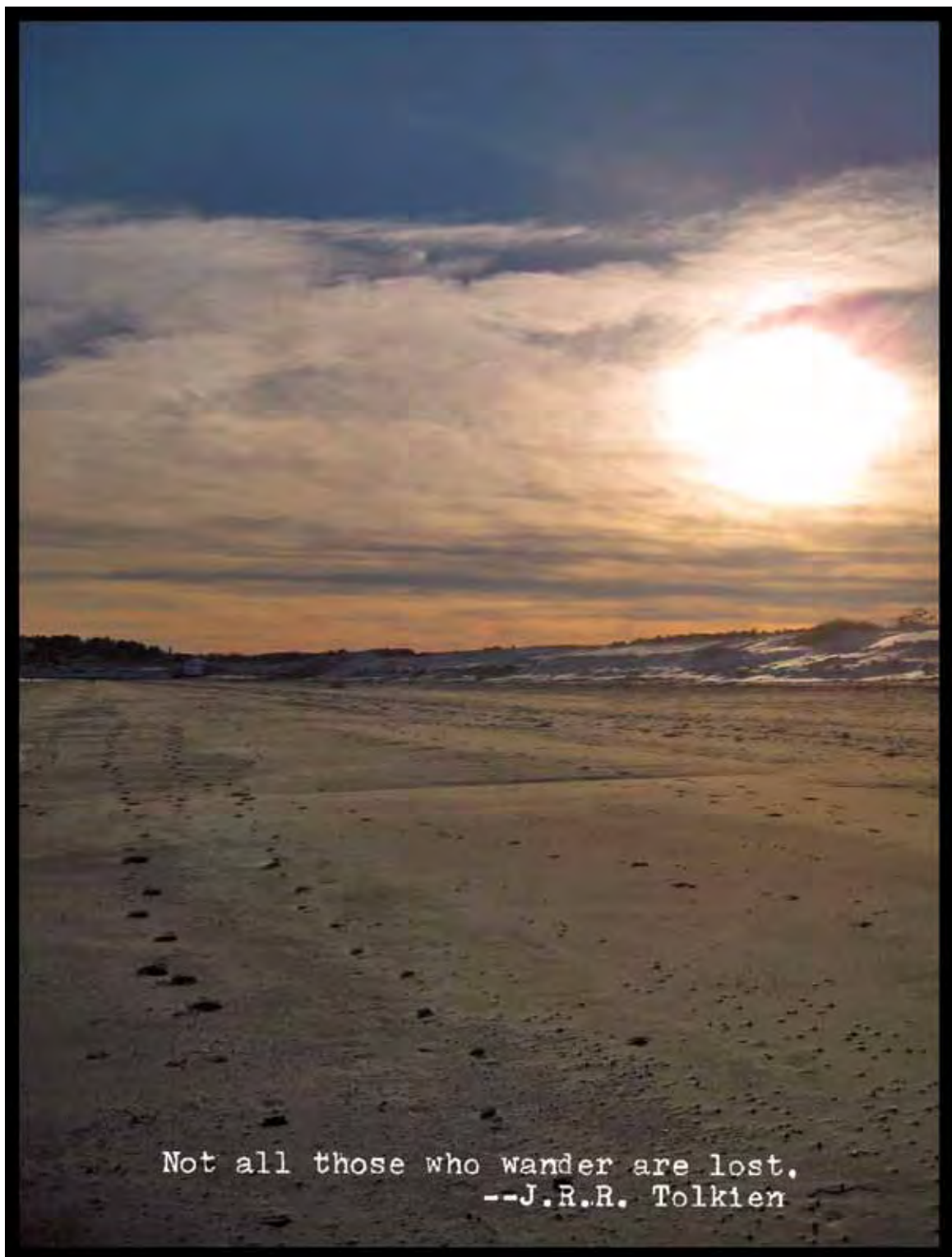
The



COLLECT

18TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

NUMBER 84 | APRIL 2013



Not all those who wander are lost.
--J.R.R. Tolkien

April 20, 2013
11:54 p.m.
Melrose, Mass.

- Welcome to the 18th anniversary issue of The Cenacle, & I am not writing from Copley Plaza in Boston. Couple reasons. First, is that Copley Square has been closed off this week, is currently a crime scene, where a few days ago bombs went off at the Boston Marathon, killing three people. So not a good time to hang around there for hours on end with computers & notebooks.

Second, where here instead is the house Kassi & I bought recently. We've known each other 10 years, & it's impossible fully to trace from then to now. In 2003, around this time, I was broke, & heartbroken, living luckily off of food stamps, & food pantry, & the generosity of a friend who had room in his home & heart for me.

It's quiet here, save the birds, & the trains going by. I am away in ways I didn't understand before

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that, in the human world, one pays for space, & security. Buying a house is a strange ritual, a kind of economic hazing, wherein one meets many strange people who populate the process - the realty agent, the mortgage broker, the inspector, the lawyer. These people become terribly important in one's life, for a little while. When their duty is dispatched, they are thanked, they are paid, & they are gone. And relief.

I like Copley Place, like assembling The Cenacle in the expansive lobby of the Marriott Hotel there. It's pretty, lots of money.

Pretty. Lots of money. It seems like that is not enough, that there are forces that run deeper. I'm trying to make sense of this violent world tonight. Not simply because my beloved metropolis was attacked. People die in cities, violently, all the time, & it does not make world headlines. No, it was an attack on the power structure, the flesh & bones around us that both controls & protects.

Why the Boston Marathon? It's

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a world famous event occurring on
Patriots Day. Why Boston? I wondered
that.

It's a bigger version of Anywhere
USA. It's not New York or Washington D.C.
It's known for history, for colleges, for
sports. Nowhere is really safe.

But that was always true. It's
just damned hard to accept. What
most of the people in this world deal
with — potential violence at any minute
of every day — is not something we
know in the US, most of us.

We serve the system. It controls us,
& protects us. But this week it didn't.
And the days of police pursuit & city
lock down & formal declaration of victory
didn't undo the fact that it failed
us. Nowhere is really safe. But that
was always true.

What then? Invade another coun-
try? Hack away more civil liberties? Maybe...
but not yet.

The thing that occurs to me tonight
is that the more you have, the more
you have to lose. And the converse
is I guess true as well.

-4/-

I don't pretend to understand those things better than I ever did. Control & protection seem inextricably bound. Even when they don't work so well.

I'll get used to home owning. People do. Strangely, it is a privilege. Will it become easier to accept that this is a very vulnerable society, no matter what efforts, smart or stupid, are made? Maybe. Could be decades before such violence again in Boston. Then again, maybe not.

I miss that last time up the in Coplay Place. I had less but probably felt safer. Isn't that strange? Here's what's stranger: I wouldn't go back.

We have to know what the world is like, to better protect it. Our country is not exempt from being targeted in both small & large ways. It's geographic necessities we understand these things can happen here, & some will triumph when they do.

What then? That is, what now? Does anything change? Does awareness bring its gift, however unwanted, of greater truths?

I don't want to think of myself

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as by nature or definition the enemy of any man. But I am, I think, in the eyes of the many fanatics of this world. I mean fanatics of all kinds. Those sure of their rightness & the rest wrong. I am an enemy to such thinkers & thoughts.

The struggle I have is to measure up against such thinkers. I am sure of my passions, & what to me seems common sense & decency. I do not pretend to know or compromise in my thinking the Truth. Some do.

If ~~from~~ these Truth-knowers that I believe much danger for human society as a whole originates. Their will press to kill, to subjugate, to explain violence & cruelty as abiding to some principle. They will not go away. Whether by religion, or politics, or economics, or whatever, they will abide. They will hunt. They will justify.

I am sorry there was such violence near Copley Place this week. I regret it. I'm sorry for the harm men willfully do one another, &

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always have, & possibly always will.
I'm sorry that we don't know better,
feel better, feel together, come
together for all the ambitions of our
gadget-obsessed societies.

I'm sorry we destroy each other &
slowly also our world. I'm sorry I
don't walk among crowds & yet love
each one within equally.

If a life could be built from such
sprouts alone, I'd try, to see what
fruits of it. But men are hopeful things
& so forthright, for all these words,
I don't feel terrible. I feel something
strange & good. I just answers, at
least music. At least song.

For me, for reasons I cannot
understand, finding the music, in it,
thus pregnancy is. There must be some-
thing to this, to have given me
all these years, but I don't know
it.

And I feel like it will be music
& the green world itself that save
us, if anything can, from the
careless truth-wielders & their reasons.

4/21/2013

The Cenacle

18TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE
NUMBER 84 | APRIL 2013

Edited by Raymond Souland

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SCRIPTOR PRESS



NEW ENGLAND

2013





9/11: The Truth is *Still* Out There

[Essay]

“The best way to control the opposition is to lead it ourselves.”

—Vladimir Ilyich Lenin

Note: This essay shares what I have learned about the attacks of September 11th, 2001 (9/11) over the past several years, in a summarized form. If you care about our country, our planet, or helping others, then please set aside some time to read this message with your skepticism, your intelligence, and your heart. Feel free to contact me at pookzta@gmail.com if you have any questions or would like to discuss this topic in more detail.

The topic of 9/11 is an extremely important one because it vividly exposes the corruption that currently plagues our society, and the reality of cheap, sustainable, renewable energy technology (the oil corporations are just one of many true suspects that could have orchestrated 9/11, then tricked our country into believing that Arab “terrorists” did it), but it requires a skeptical-yet-open mind in order to understand the implications of all the easily verifiable empirical evidence. I encourage you not to blindly accept what I am telling you here; rather, I encourage you to draw your own conclusions regarding the following information.

9/11 is irrefutable proof that:

1. affordable forms of energy technology, such as those discovered and inspired by the great Nikola Tesla, do indeed exist and could be providing our entire planet with clean, sustainable, and limitless energy *right now*;
2. countless lives and resources have been wasted on wars of death and destruction, all as a result of an extremely inaccurate, unscientific story, when these precious lives and resources could instead be used to improve our beautiful country and planet;
3. and, most importantly, each and every one of us is capable of slicing through the dishonesty and corruption by thinking critically and studying the available facts for ourselves.

The horrible individuals who orchestrated 9/11 (not the “hijackers,” for I am referring to the true culprits, whoever they may be) were apparently smart enough to plan multiple layers of the post-9/11 cover-up. The first layer of the cover-up was their ability to fool and/or control the corporate media channels into promoting the unscientific, easily disprovable document known as the *9/11 Commission Report* (formally named *Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*). I will not bother going into details about why the official story is wrong because, as you may already know, the New York City seismographic data alone is sufficient to show that the *9/11 Commission Report* is inaccurate and unscientific.



How is this steel turning to dust in mid-air? The smaller pieces in the air are aluminum cladding from the exterior of the building, but the large slabs/grids turning to dust towards the bottom of the image are steel. What can transform steel to fine dust in mid-air?

One way that some people have come to understand the inaccurate nature of the “official story” is because of an architect named Richard Gage who claims that an explosive called “thermite” or “nano-thermite” was what brought down the two towers of the World Trade Center down on 9/11. While Gage is correct in saying that the American people have not been told the truth, this does not mean that he is correct in his assertion that explosives and/or thermite are supported by the evidence from 9/11. In fact, thermite may not have been used at all (and most likely was not, in my opinion).

I must again stress the importance of being cautious and skeptical here, because the false nature of the *9/11 Commission Report* does not necessarily mean that our government orchestrated the 9/11 attacks. It was the National Institute for Standards and Technology (NIST) and the private weapons/defense/security corporations (including Science Applications International Corp. [SAIC], Applied Research Associates [ARA], and many others) that engaged in an enormous conflict of interest when NIST contracted these private corporations to conduct the fraudulent 9/11 “investigations” using our tax dollars (it’s like paying a fox to guard your chickens). It is NIST and these private weapons/defense/security corporations, many which have members in the Directed Energy Professional Society (DEPS), that are the primary suspects for 9/11, not necessarily our government. At the very least, NIST and these suspect corporations are the groups we absolutely must bring to court for evidence-based interrogation and questioning.

The second layer of the 9/11 cover-up is that being put forth by Gage, Dr. Steven Jones, Alex Jones, David Ray Griffin, and a host of other fraudulent “investigators” who claim they are pursuing truth and justice when, in actuality, closer inspection reveals they are doing just the opposite. The key to their past successes is the fact that they are “waking” people up to the lies of the *9/11 Commission Report* and, by having done so, are gaining people’s trust while subtly convincing them to accept blindly the unscientific, explosives-only/thermite-only theory.

Gage and the other so-called 9/11 “researchers” simply share with the public the evidence they want people to hear in an attempt to convince them of what they want them to believe. Suspiciously, they do not mention the overwhelming sum of easily verifiable physical evidence that thermite and explosives do not explain—evidence that conclusively shows that directed energy weapons must have been used on 9/11. They most likely choose to ignore this evidence not only because it is not explained by thermite or explosives of any kind but, more importantly, because the private weapons/defense/security corporations that engaged in the conflict-of-interest relationship with NIST to conduct the fraudulent 9/11 “investigations” with our tax dollars also happen to be the leading corporations in the field of directed energy weapon research. This is also the most likely reason that Gage fails to mention that his partner, Dr. Steven Jones, used to work for Los Alamos National Laboratories, the same laboratory that conducted the Manhattan Project to develop the atomic bomb and other highly advanced, top-secret weapons.

Most evidence in support of thermite or explosives is testimonial in nature, such as witnesses “hearing explosions” or “seeing molten liquid.” Testimonial evidence is the weakest form of evidence because people are often mistaken and/or biased. Loud, explosive noises can be caused by many things, and it is very plausible that items were independently exploding as the buildings were transformed to dust. Additionally, glowing objects or liquids do not directly imply hot or molten steel, as many objects can glow or melt under lower stresses and



How is this steel turning to dust in mid-air? The smaller pieces in the air are aluminum cladding from the exterior of the building, but the large slab being turned to dust towards the bottom of the image is steel.

temperatures.

Consider the following example. Let's say I provided you with the following factual evidence: I own a common household pet, a mammal, who barks very loudly and drools when I place food in front of him. He wags his tail, eats meat, has lots of hair, has four legs, and eats from under the table. He is known as "man's best friend," can "sit," "stay," and "roll over," and is related to wolves. Based on this factual information, you can inarguably conclude that I own a dog, because there is no other reasonable explanation to account for all of the facts that are available to describe my pet. However, if you were to try and guess the specific breed or color of the dog I own, that would be theory or speculation because the factual evidence only allows you to conclude that I own a general category of animal known as a dog.

Only the general category of weapons technology known as directed energy weapons can explain all of the empirical evidence from 9/11, and it does so completely and irrefutably.

The third layer of the 9/11 cover-up is a widespread internet campaign to slander, criticize, and censor information about the *only* 9/11 researcher who has meticulously analyzed *all* of the physical evidence from 9/11. This researcher is also the *only* person who has offered a scientific conclusion that explains *all* of this physical evidence from 9/11 and, furthermore, she is the *only* researcher who has taken all of this evidence and filed it in a court of law in the form of a federal *qui tam* whistleblower case against the private weapons/defense/security corporations previously mentioned. The case was so strong, thanks to all the physical evidence this researcher has discovered, that it was successfully appealed to the level of the U.S. Supreme Court in October 2009, despite the attempts of corporate defense lawyers pushing for dismissal of the case at each level of appeal. The case was abruptly and unlawfully dismissed by the Supreme Court, and this is detailed in the legal documents found on this researcher's website which I will direct you to later.

The brave researcher I am speaking of is Dr. Judy Wood, a materials scientist and engineer who lost her job at Clemson University after she began raising awareness about the important evidence that can only be explained, in totality, by directed energy weapons. The entities that make up this third layer of the 9/11 cover-up are 9/11 "truth" websites, chat rooms, groups, and individuals, widely found on the internet and in corporate media, that are purposely trying to direct people to ignore the important evidence that Dr. Judy Wood has discovered.

Several of these groups claim to be 9/11 "truth" groups but, if you even mention Dr. Judy Wood or the important evidence she has discovered, they will often censor you, ban you from their group, or ridicule you for discussing her. I know this because I have experienced it first-hand, time and time again, and have been banned from a long list of 9/11 "truth" websites and groups just for sharing the important physical evidence that Dr. Judy Wood has discovered. Many disrespectful individuals have also taken the evidence Dr. Judy Wood has discovered and presented it on their own in unscientific, discrediting ways (some of these "researchers" assert that Dr. Judy Wood claims that aliens orchestrated 9/11, or that this directed energy weapon is in space, so-called "space beams," which is false since she has never made such claims).

These attempts at censorship are meant to prevent more people from discovering that Dr. Judy Wood is correct in her evidence-based scientific conclusions about 9/11. Even a small group of *Wikipedia* administrators censor *Wikipedia* so that no one can create a page devoted to Dr. Judy Wood, and so that there is not one mention of her name, book, or website on the "9/11 Truth Movement" *Wikipedia* page. I personally experienced this when I tried to add her



Where did the building go? Seconds earlier, there was one of the world's largest office buildings standing here (notice the traffic light which marks street level). What caused this?

name to that *Wikipedia* page because of the importance of her research but I was censored.

The large body of empirical evidence from 9/11, assembled by Dr. Judy Wood, is conclusive and irrefutable, so one only needs to study it in detail to prove this; no theorizing or speculation are necessary. Below, I have listed some important pieces of evidence that *must* be explained. This list is just a small fraction of the thousands of photos, graphs, videos, and documents which Dr. Judy Wood has gathered, which are certainly are not explained by jet fuel and/or explosives of any kind. Please consider the following evidence-based questions:

- How come most of the Twin Towers' steel and concrete was transformed into a fine dust, while large quantities of aluminum exhibited strange electrical warping and burns, yet paper was unharmed?
- Why was Hurricane Erin traveling straight for New York City from September 7-11, 2001, yet it was not reported on by local media broadcasts in that area in the days leading up to 9/11?
- Why were there statistically significant magnetosphere readings in Alaska at the very same time of the 9/11 attacks?
- How come there are many reports of power outages and electrical failures in the areas surrounding Ground Zero just as the attacks commenced?
- Why were numerous first responders' Scott packs (oxygen tanks) spontaneously exploding around Ground Zero?
- How were the Twin Towers turned to dust so fine that it floated high up into the atmosphere?
- How come 1,400+ vehicles located several blocks away (some up to a quarter-mile away) from Ground Zero experienced metal warping and electricity-like burns and holes during the attacks? If you think the building debris caused these things, then how come that same debris did not burn the clothing or skin of the nearby pedestrians it covered?
- How come countless vehicles located several blocks away from Ground Zero were flipped upside down, or on their side, next to trees which still had all of their leaves on them?
- How come several steel beams were observed to be bent and/or shriveled up in very unusual ways, ways which have only been observed during the Hutchison Effect experiments?
- Why were no toilets recovered from the small WTC rubble pile? Thousands of toilets, yet not a single one was found in the rubble?
- Why was only one file cabinet found in the small WTC rubble pile? Thousands of metal file cabinets, yet only one was found?
- How did countless pieces of paper money survive the WTC attacks?
- How did countless plastic photo IDs survive the WTC attacks?
- How come spontaneous rusting of materials occurred all around Ground Zero? In some instances, entire front-halves of cars were rusted, while the back-halves appeared to be virtually untouched?
- How come various debris at Ground Zero were still observed to be fuming and having to be hosed down well into 2008, as video evidence clearly shows? Do fires last for seven years?



“Dustification” of the remaining steel columns. What could have done this?

- How come circular holes were observed in the windows of virtually all the buildings near Ground Zero, when holes like these are known only to be caused by longitudinal waves of energy?
- How was the “bathtub,” the area directly beneath the Twin Towers, left virtually unharmed?
- How was the Looney Toons gift shop in the basement of the WTC buildings left virtually unharmed, so dramatically that the Bugs Bunny statue and other statues were not even scratched or dented?
- How was the PATH train beneath the WTC buildings left virtually unharmed? Shouldn't falling building debris have crushed that train or, at the very least, knocked it off the tracks?

References for Further Research

1. *Where Did The Towers Go?* by Dr. Judy Wood
<http://wheredidthetowersgo.com>

This is the most evidence-packed piece of literature regarding 9/11. It is based neither on theory nor speculation; rather, it is based on well-referenced physical evidence, and analysis and discussion of that evidence, and the inescapable conclusions that are drawn from that evidence. The few American publishers that were willing to print Dr. Judy Wood's book would suspiciously only allow her to print it if she removed several important pieces of evidence, or if she only printed the important photos and graphs in black-and-white. Dr. Judy Wood had to get this book printed in a foreign country, and then shipped to various locations in the United States via boat, to ensure that the book was published in its full-color, scientific, textbook format.

2. *9/11 Challenge: Explain the Evidence*
<http://pookzta.blogspot.com/2010/12/911-challenge-explain-evidence.html>

This is a brief summary of some of the important physical evidence Dr. Judy Wood has discovered. This article is good to share with others who are hesitant to purchase Dr. Judy Wood's amazing textbook.

3. *Why Did a U.S. Army Major & Soviet Nuclear Intelligence Officer Contact Me (Abe) Regarding 9/11?*
<http://pookzta.blogspot.com/2010/07/911-free-energy.html>

Shortly after I began speaking out about Dr. Judy Wood, two high-ranking retired military officers spontaneously contacted me, within a few weeks of each other, to try and convince me that Dr. Judy Wood is wrong. The non-evidence-based claims they attempted to convince me of were very alarming, and what I learned about them from my research was even more concerning.



“My intellectual integrity prevents me from calling this a collapse. This is why I have chosen to stand up. My conscience leaves me no other choice.” —Dr. Judy Wood

4. *An Open Letter to PatriotsQuestion911.com* by Dr. Eric Larsen
<http://pookzta.blogspot.com/2011/03/open-letter-to-patriotsquestion911com.html>

This letter addresses the fact that the owners of the PatriotsQuestion911.com website silently removed Dr. Judy Wood from the list of 9/11 researchers quite some time ago. Considering that Dr. Judy Wood is the most highly qualified researcher to investigate 9/11, due to her background in materials science engineering, and that she has gathered more physical evidence and taken more legal action than any other scientist in the history of 9/11 research, the fact that her profile was deleted from the PatriotsQuestion911.com website is extremely suspicious.

5. *9/11 & Free Energy*
<http://pookzta.blogspot.com/2010/07/ex-us-army-major-ex-soviet-intelligence.html>

This article examines the evidence against the unscientific thermite-only/explosives-only theories, as well as evidence suggesting that Dr. Steven Jones, Richard Gage, and others are purposely misleading concerned Americans with their biased, unscientific presentations.

6. *9/11 Finding The Truth* by Andrew Johnson
<http://www.checktheevidence.com/pdf/9-11%20-%20Finding%20the%20Truth.pdf>

This amazing free book thoroughly covers the entire topic of 9/11.

7. *Check The Evidence* by Andrew Johnson
<http://CheckTheEvidence.com>

This website is filled with important information that covers a wide variety of topics, including 9/11 and Free Energy. Based out of the United Kingdom, Andrew Johnson and his evidence-packed website have played a major role in helping to spread factual evidence and information about a variety of extremely important topics.

* * * * *



Joe Ciccone

Folk Rhyme

Never unheard, those cries in blackened corners,
Huddled closer, like sirens through frozen water;
Blue inside blue, on the night of my father,
My lectern raving, flaming in stormy weather.

Blue inside blue, a cavalry of crystal—
Mine the hunted, mind the polished arrow.
He begat she, mapped out our cursed days—
Five ghosts shall rise, and brakemen line the way.

Sorrows of the grove, the murder and fiddle,
The bagged head shivers, then falls from the gallows;
A thousand lovers struggle toward the grave.
Somber is the tune, an odyssey away.

Tell her plain of the silent lies, you the truth-keeper,
You of the clear eyes, you of the bitter green,
Cool as dulcimer strings, cool beyond how.
Blue inside blue, I raise not the slightest vowel.

* * *

Clarity

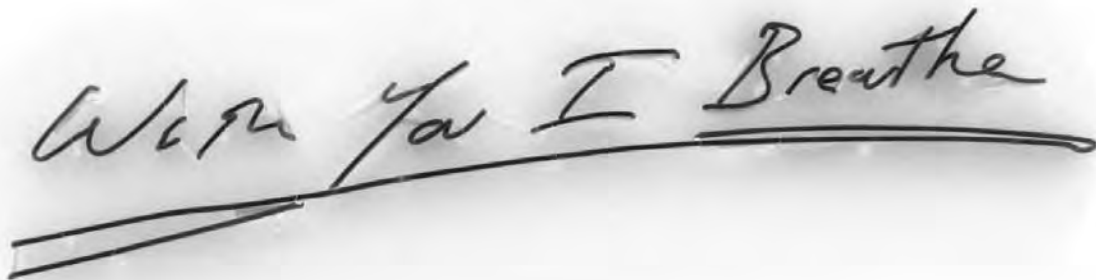
I carved your name on the carving stone,
Psyched, with the fight of a minstrel,
Doomed, tho heaven was mine.

I came upon a place no other had seen—
Hi-hats and stacks of old canes,
Typewriters lost in rhyme.

Tirelessly I led a tired band,
Hapless under the weight of age,
Yet wise, as only an only son can be.

Guarded in your tone, you approached,
Deaf to my echoing ballads, lame to my rage—
And blind, to even the bluest eyes.

* * * * *

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "When Ya I Breathe". The signature is written in dark ink on a light background. The words "When Ya I" are written in a fluid, connected cursive style, while "Breathe" is written in a slightly more upright, but still cursive, style. The entire signature is underlined with two parallel horizontal lines.



P as in Peter

[Essay]

I. Preface

Some years ago, a young American artist named Keith P. Rein got tired of being asked what his middle initial P. stood for. He started telling people, “The P is for Penis.” That was just to shut them up, but they were so amused that he decided to name his business after the phrase. It’s not exactly original. The Royal Navy’s old “Alphabet Song” said the same thing: “P is for Penis, all pranged up and peeled.” Just like a man to come up with that, isn’t it? But it’s not only boys who think of penises when they think of the letter P. Girls do it too. When the self-described “mommy blogger” Catherine Connors decided to make up a “crazy, dirty alphabet ditty” of her own, she came to the same conclusion: “P is for phallus that stands at attention!”¹ It sure is, and I’ll show you why.

I’ve heard people deny it indignantly, but the letter’s shape tells the whole story. If you rotate P a quarter-turn clockwise, you’ll see a perfectly recognizable cock-and-balls, the shaft pointing left and loopy testicles flopping down on the right. What! That’s just an accident! Well, I think not. I think our ancestors shaped the letter P to look the way it does because they recognized the phallic nature of words that start with its lippy “puh” sound, like *piss* and *pole* and *poke*. These connotations are hardly a secret. The linguist John Lawler acknowledged in an important 1990 article² that *pr-* words like *prong* and *pry* have “phallic 1-D associations,” the same one-dimensional sharpness as *pencils* and *pokers*. Very true, but the question is: Why? How did P and its “puh” sound happen to get mixed up with phalluses? And why “puh” and not “yuh” or “nuh”?

The question answers itself if you pay attention to your lips as you say the sound. *Puh*. You’re kind of spitting, right? Spitting out air. *Puh*, *puff*. Fremont’s classroom alphabet chart³ calls P the “push” sound and introduces it by emphasizing its gushiness: “Put your lips together and ‘push’ it out.” *Push* it, *puff* it, *spit* it out. When you pronounce the word *spit*, can you feel how your lips are actually doing it? The action, the sound, and the idea are all united. Puffing and panting—that’s how P started its career. ‘Breath’ in Latin is *spiritus*, as in *respiration*. When the autistic British savant Daniel Tammet invented the private language he called Māndi, he named ‘breath’ and ‘wind’ *puhu*. Now, if I’m making up words like that and I’ve decided to call a spurt of air *spiritus* or *puhu*, what would I call a spurt of water? Probably something similar, like *piss* or *pour*. Maybe I’d slap on a hissing *s* sound for emphasis and call it *spit* or *spew*. How about spurting semen? Same thing, probably. The Greeks called it *sperma*, and modern slang calls it *spoo*. Finally, what should we call the thing that spurts out the spoo? The Greeks settled on *peos* or *posthe*, and the Romans settled on *penis*, a word so apt that it remains the formal term in most languages three thousand years later.

Let’s retrace our steps. We started with onomatopoeia: *puff*, *pant*. That’s air spurting.

From there metaphor took us to spurting liquid, as in *piss* and *sperm*. Then metonymy—guilt by association—suggested a *p* name for the organ that shoots those liquids out, the *penis*. Now we move up a level, because we’ve accidentally linked the “puh” sound to the PHALLUS, a mental archetype so powerful that its gravity basically tugs the sound into permanent orbit. Henceforth, P words will no longer relate primarily to breath or water; their main job will be to name things that remind us of the PHALLUS. A phallus’s unmistakable shape—a long cylinder with a point at one end—gives us our key metaphor for pointy objects (*pencil*, *spear*), what those objects do (*poke*, *penetrate*), how they feel (*prickly*), and the kind of people who resemble them (*pricks*). The metonymy of the PHALLUS is even more single-minded. It simply hijacks P words for anything related to sex or the area between the legs: *passion*, *parenting*, *poop*, *perverts*. This is why almost any P word can exude a faint whiff of taboo—why, in Arianna Huffington’s phrase, even *Prius* cars sound “vaguely naughty.”

II. The Sprinkler

The first link in P’s chain of ideas may be the ‘breath’ issuing from the mouth, but I want to emphasize that any emanation from the body can have a P name, whether it comes from the head or somewhere below. Mouths *puff*, *pant*, and *speak* (*peep*, *prattle*, French *parler*). They also emit certain liquids: *spit*, *sputum*, and *puke*. French eyes tear up with *pleurs*; French rain is *pluie*. Wounds leak *pus*, babies *poop* and *piss*. Orgasms gush *spoo* or *sp(l)oooge*. Male spoo is *sperm* or *spunk*. Eggs are *spawn*. Fungi shed *spores*. Some of this leakage is figurative: a tired man is *pooped*, a man after orgasm is *spent*. We *spend* money too: *paying* it out, *pissing* it away, and *spreading* it around in *sprees* and *splurges*.

Inanimate sources of gushing fluid include *spring*, *pump*, *sprinkler*, *water-pistol*, *water-spout*, *spigot*, *pipe*, *pitcher* ‘jug’. Words in *sp-* often suggest fountainy effects: *splash*, *spray*, *spritz*, *sprinkle*, *spatter*. Others describe the scatter of dots left behind by a spray: *sparks*, *spangles*, *sprinkles*, *specks*, *spots*, e-mail *spam*. Spots that *pepper* a face are *pimples* or *pockmarks*, and spotted horses are known as *pintos*, *paints*, and *piebalds*. Anything that seems to radiate outward from a center is apt to be named like a spray of fluid: *spokes* on a wheel, *sprockets* on a gear, a *spider’s* legs, the *splendor* of the sun’s rays, a *sprig* of greenery, *splinters* on a tree stump, a gymnast’s *split*. When enough fluid splashes onto a surface, it *pools* up and *sprawls* outward to make smooth *ponds* and *puddles*—flat, watery *planes*. That’s why so many *p(l)-* words refer to flat surfaces: *plate*, *platter*, *plaza*, *plywood*, French *plancher* ‘floor’, Spanish *piso* ‘floor’—all “flat as a *pancake*.”

III. The Spear

Although gushiness is the aspect of phallic imagery that got P its job, once hired it was asked to represent the phallus’s shape and function as well, the *pole* that *pierces*. This implication is hardly confined to English, or even to Europe. In Indonesian, *patil* and *patok* mean ‘pole’, *paku* is ‘nail’, and *pacak* is ‘to impale’. In Peruvian Quechua, *polo* signals ‘complete penetration through a barrier’. In Nigerian Tiv, *pever* is ‘to puncture’ and *pever kwase* is ‘to deflower a virgin’. Mere linearity is not enough. Many *st-* words from the TREE archetype are also linear, like *stick*, *staff*, *stripe*; but harmful T words like *stab* are rare because trees are not characteristically sharp. By contrast, the PHALLUS has a conspicuous *point* at the business end, so the defining trait of linear P objects is that they are *sharp at one end*, like *pencils*. That’s how

we know they're phallic.

P boasts a big armory of 'weapons': *spears* and their long-handled cousins *pikes*, *spontoons*, *partisans*, and *pole-axes*, as well as various knives and daggers: *puncheon*, *poniard*, *spud*, *pen-knife*, *pocket-knife*. The ancient Roman sword called a *spatha* became the slim *épée* used by modern fencers, and the Roman *pilum* 'javelin' turned into the modern German *Pfeil* 'arrow'. Yet not every sharp P object is a weapon. Garden sheds bristle with its 'sharp tools': *pegs*, *spikes*, *spits*, *prongs*; plus *pickets* and *palings* for fences; *spades*, *picks*, and *plows* for breaking ground, *prods* and *spurs* for handling animals, and *peaveys* and *pokers* for handling logs.

All these tools and weapons being named for penises—isn't that a bit much to claim? Shall we ask Sigmund Freud? Doctor, would you please compare the examples above to the unconscious visual symbols that represent phalluses in people's dreams? Certainly: "The male genital organ is symbolically represented in dreams in many different ways. . . . Its more conspicuous and, to both sexes, more interesting part, the penis, is symbolized primarily by objects which resemble it in form, being long and upstanding, such as *sticks*, *umbrellas*, *poles*, *trees* and the like; also by objects which . . . have the property of penetrating, and consequently of injuring, the body,—that is to say, pointed weapons of all sorts: *knives*, *daggers*, *lances*, *sabres*; fire-arms are similarly used: *guns*, *pistols* and *revolvers*, these last being a very appropriate symbol on account of their [P-like] shape. . . . [The meaning of] objects from which water flows is again easily comprehensible: *taps*, *water-cans*, or *springs*; [and likewise of many tools:] *Pencils*, *pen-holders*, *nail-files*, *hammers*, and other *implements* are undoubtedly male sexual symbols."⁴

It's not just nouns that betray this imagery. Verbs, adjectives, and prefixes do their part too. Their meanings often cluster around a secondary archetype of one particular weapon—a weapon that our ancestors were making and throwing half a million years ago, the SPEAR. What are two things you'd notice about a spear, aside from its shape? That it's sharp, and it's fast. In other words, *spears* are *spiky* and *speedy*. Different languages weight these qualities differently. Spanish for 'speed' is *prisa*, and 'fast' is *presto* or *pronto*. Stinging-hot food is *picante*, like insects' sharp little stings (*picaduras*). English *pretty* is a 'sharp' word too. For centuries, *pretty* usually meant 'sharp-witted' ("a pretty fellow") or 'requiring sharp wits to solve' ("a pretty paradox"), until those meanings were crowded out by the modern sense of 'sharp-looking, attractive' ("a pretty girl"). The word's basic sense of 'sharply or distinctly' is also apparent in the adverb ("pretty rare"), except when its point is blunted by over-use ("pretty good").

Spear qualities are even more obvious in P verbs. Most English verbs for 'put in' begin with P, for example, both simple ones like *prick*, *poke*, *press*, *pierce*, *plunge*, *puncture*, *penetrate*, and more specialized ones like *perforate*, *punch*, *probe*, and *pry*—including the visual prying of *peer*, *peek*, *spectate*, *spy*. (A person who "*pokes* his nose" into other people's business is a *Nosy Parker* or *Paul Pry*.) In fact, it's all but impossible to talk about any sort of 'puncturing' without using P words: that's how completely the letter owns this idea. It's a spear idea, of course, because well-thrown spears literally 'go through' their targets. 'Go through' is the literal meaning of *per-* in *pervade* and *permeate*. 'Go through' was also the literal meaning of *prassein*, the Greek verb for 'do or achieve' and the source of two words we still use for people who can finish or "go through with" the things they plan: *pragmatic* and *practical*. And look at all our short P verbs for different kinds of 'constructive action': *ply* a trade and *plug* away at it; *plow* and *plant*, *play*, *please*, *prove*, *praise*, *prop up*, *prep* and *prime*, *plan*, *pray*, *plead*, *pledge*. All of these distantly evoke the flight of a well-thrown spear, our oldest metaphor for successful effort.

The metaphor gains clarity when we realize that a spear is a *projectile*—that is,

something *projected* or ‘thrown’ in hopes of hitting a target. That’s why we call any goal-oriented activity a *project*: it’s a ‘throwing forward’ of our intentions, which take shape like the arc of a spear’s flight, from *preparing* and *proceeding* to *persistence* and finally to *progress*. The common ‘before’ prefixes *pre-* and *pro-* are speartips whistling along ahead of everything else, spearheading the flight exactly the way a leader *spearheads* a project. Leaders earn their name because they *precede* their group by standing first or going first: *prince*, *president*, *premier*, *prime mover*, *prime minister*. Any firstness, any earliness, is a speartip: *primary*, *prominent*, *prior*, *primitive*, *pristine*, *proto*, *prompt*, *precocious*, *preemie*.⁵

IV. The Pin

Perfection is getting the spear right on target: *spot-on* in English, *au point* in French. We describe extreme precision in terms of the miniature spears called *pins*, which is why ‘exactness’ involves *pinning something down* or *pinpointing* it. The important word *point*, in the sense of ‘dot’, is from Latin *punctum*, the telltale dot left by a pinprick’s puncture. That’s why a *punctual* person arrives “on the dot,” and why “dotting all your *i*’s” makes you *punctilious*—that is, careful and *precise*. Pins are also a by-word for ‘smallness’. Tiny things are *no bigger than the head of a pin*, a bit of change is *pin-money*, something of no value *isn’t worth two pins*. Among other characteristically tiny P objects, Margaret Magnus lists “*pebbles, pellets, peas, points* and *periods*.”⁶ Many P words literally mean ‘small’: Latin *parvus*, *paucus*, *pusillus*, *paulus*, modern Romance *petit*, *poco*, *piccolo*, *pequeño*; and English *petty*, *paltry*, *puny*, *piddling*, *pint-size*, *pocket-size*, *palmtop*, and *piss-ant*. Small people are *pee-wees*, *pygmies*, and *pipsqueaks*.

There’s sexism here too. Just as women are physically smaller than men, the tiny pin beside the mighty spear represents the laughable smallness of women’s concerns. *Neat as a pin*, we say of a well-kept house. The brisk housekeeper in the British sitcom *Bless Me, Father* is Mrs. *Pring*. Pippi Longstocking’s scolding neighbor is Mrs. *Prysebius*, and many stories are enlivened by comical P aunts: Aunt *Polly* in *Tom Sawyer*, “old aunt *Pedigree*” in *She Stoops to Conquer*, and Aunt *Pittypat* in *Gone with the Wind*. Governesses are another P bunch: Miss *Pross* in *A Tale of Two Cities*, Miss *Prism* in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Dame *Pluche* in a French play by Alfred de Musset, and of course *Mary Poppins*. Spit-spot!

V. Pinheads

These women are all *prim and proper*, or less kindly, *prissy*. These terms circle each other endlessly. In *The New York Times*, James Barron calls a soap-opera grande dame “a three-P character: *proper*, *prim* and even *prissy*.” The same paper calls British rappers’ enunciation “overly *precise*, even *prissy*,” and its review of Shaw’s play *Candida* mentions “the *prim* and *proper* . . . *Prossy*, the vicar’s doting secretary.” In the same vein, I have heard a club described as “*primpy* and *prissy*,” and an overgroomed dog as “all *primmed* and *propered* and *powdered*—she was little Miss *Perfect*!” Jane Fonda uses almost exactly the same sequence of words in *Barefoot in the Park* to assail her lawyer husband for being so “extremely *proper* and dignified. . . . You’re very nearly *perfect*!” He snaps back: “That’s a rotten thing to say!” His name is *Paul*.

Fussy men often have P names: Mr. *Spock*, Agatha Christie’s *Poirot*, the “meticulous” *Pattison* in *Company of Cowards*. The stock name for a mama’s boy is *Percy*. Australians call the British *Poms*, a word of murky origins but clear implications. British accents are *posh* or “overly

precise,” as the writer above put it; another writer mentions Hugh Grant’s “*plummy Pimm’s Cup* accent.” Class envy? Linguist John Lawler would say so. The second semantic category he claimed for *pr-* (after “one-dimensional”) was “class role,” concentrating on “*propriety* and *privilege*” up top but acknowledging the bottom too, *prince* and *pauper* alike. *Preppies*, *patricians*, and *plutocrats* are at the *pinnacle* of society, up at the very *peak* of the social *pyramid*; while the *poor*—the *people*, the *public*, the *plebes*, *proles*, *peasants*, and *peons*—root around in the muck at the bottom. The rich are proud and erect; Spanish *pijo* ‘prick’ also means ‘rich kid’ and ‘posh’.

If the letter P were a fairy tale, says Margaret Magnus, it would be *The Princess and the Pea*. But if the tale’s dainty princess can be deranged by a single dried pea under her mattress, maybe all that “*propriety* and *privilege*” up in the castle is just a bunch of tommyrot. Maybe the prince himself is just a *pompous* ass: a *pooh-bah*, a *potentate*, a *grand panjandrum*. A *prick*, in fact. That’s an interesting insult. It’s phallic, but it’s pin-like too. Prickish people are narrow and rigid, but mostly they’re intent on popping other people’s balloons. Euphemisms emphasize the pointiness: the “*pointy-haired boss*” in *Dilbert*, George Wallace’s “*pointy-headed intellectuals*.” *Prigs*, *spoilsports*, and “*party-pooing Puritans*” are out to stop fun, like the “thought *police*” who enforce *political correctness*. An officious German is “a little *Piefke*,” an officious Frenchman is a *pète-sec*. Minor officials on power trips are mosquitoey: *pesky*, *peevish*, *particular*, *persnickety*. Those qualities are the underbelly of exactness. P is “precise,” says Magnus, but it “errs on the side of pickiness.”

Mind your *p*’s and *q*’s, children! Teachers and clergymen hail from the same P camp as governesses. Schools have *principals*, *provosts*, *pupils*, and *pedagogues*. Scholars are *pedants*, and professors speak “with *painstaking precision*.” Remember *Professor Plum* in *Clue*, or Dav Pilkey’s mad genius *Professor Poopypants*? Even schools get in on the act. *Vanity Fair* opens at “Miss *Pinkerton’s* academy for young ladies.” *The Catcher in the Rye* opens at *Pencey Prep*, where Holden is visiting his teacher Mr. *Spencer*. Evelyn Waugh’s novel *Decline and Fall* goes one better: it opens in the office of Oxford bursar Mr. *Postlethwaite*, and then traces the fortunes of two teachers named *Paul Pennyfeather* and Mr. *Prendergast*.

The second man eventually ends up as *Reverend Prendergast*, thereby exchanging one P zone (the School) for another (the Church). John Lawler shrewdly numbered “*prophet*, *priest*, *prelate*, and *prior*” among his *pr-* authority figures. Compare *pastor*, *preacher*, *parson*; plus *pew*, *pulpit*, *parish*, *piety*, *pilgrim*, *prayer*, *penance*, *proselytize*, *pontiff*, *pope*. The first pope was St. *Peter*, and ten of the twenty popes since 1740 have used the names *Paul* or *Pius*. The American poet T. S. Eliot wickedly subverted all these churchly P’s in his little masterpiece “Mr. Eliot’s Sunday Morning Service,” which distastefully observes “*pustular*” boys fingering “*piaculative pence*” while “sable *presbyters*” glide toward “the avenue of *penitence*.” To get us in the mood, Eliot opens his poem with one P word, *polyphiloprogenitive*, and reverently closes it with another, *polymath*.

T. S. Eliot is the patron saint of the letter P. He called himself Old *Possum*, and he adopted a rather donnish appearance to match—“*prune-faced*,” as a friend of mine put it. I’m sure Eliot would have agreed, for his self-portrait in “Five-Finger Exercises” gleefully mocks his own “mouth so *prim*” and “features of clerical [clergyman’s] cut.” It also mocks his speech, “so nicely / Restricted to What *Precisely* / And If and *Perhaps* and But.” Indeed, the only man more artfully repressed than Eliot himself is his own creation J. Alfred *Prufrock*, who famously asks, “Do I dare to eat a *peach*?” Ever cautious and “*politic*,” Eliot’s *Prufrock* wears a modest necktie



“asserted by a simple *pin*,” has a soul that’s “*pinned* and wriggling on the wall,” and measures out his days “with coffee *spoons*,” ever wondering “should I *presume*?”

VI. Pampers

Now that we’re done with Prufrock, we’re done with metaphors. We’ve looked at all the figures of speech that emerge from the visual PHALLUS imagery of spears, pins, and their points, and we’ve drawn portraits of all the annoying people, male and female, that we associate with pins and pinpricks. What will concern us next is phallic metonymy: not P categories that *resemble* phalluses, but rather P categories that are in any way *mixed up with* phalluses, from *porn* and *prophylactics* (‘condoms’) all the way to *pussies* and *parturition* (‘birth’). In other words, anything concerning the field of sex, upon which P has planted its naughty flag.

Let’s start at the wholesome end of the field. Madeleine Gray says sex “can be summed up in three P’s: *procreation*, *pleasure*, and *pride*.”⁷ Love constitutes one’s *private* or *personal* life. Lovemaking is *passion*, and a lover is a *paramour* or *spouse*. Have you ever noticed how many lovers’ endearments begin with P? A modern favorite is *Pooh*; more traditional ones are *pudding*, *pumpkin*, *sweetie-pie*, *sweet potato*, *sweet pea*. Sexually open atmospheres are *permissive*, requests for sex are *propositions*, and *promiscuous* people juggle lots of *partners*. Sex itself is *petting*, *pleasuring*, *pumping*, *porking*, and eventually *pregnancy*. British slang for ‘impregnate’ is *prang up*, and of course the impregnator is the *papa*, the root behind Latin *paternal* and *patriarch*. We call father and mother together *parents*. As for children, the Greeks called them *sperma*, which meant ‘offspring’ as well as ‘semen’ (like *seed* in biblical English). Our words *pediatric* and *puerile* (‘childish’) both stem from the ancient Indo-European root *pau-* (‘child’), and other English words for children include (*off*)*spring*, *progeny*, and *posterity*.

Sex and childbirth make the whole *pelvic* area a P zone. Genitals are *private parts*. *Pubic* is from Latin *pubes* ‘groin’. Women’s genitals are *pudenda* (‘shameful’), or less formally, *pussy*, *pookie*, *poonie*. (A critic reviewing a lesbian play says its set is “so *pink* as to verge on the biological”—is that why the color is considered so feminine?) A woman’s clitoral hood or a man’s foreskin is a *prepuce*. The fake foreskin we call a condom is euphemistically known as *protection* or *prophylactic*; in German it’s *Präservativ* or *Pariser* (‘Parisian’). The Marquis de Sade’s “very personal euphemism for a dildo” was *prestige*.⁸ The skin between genitals and anus is the *perineum*, *Popo* is German baby-talk for ‘bottom’, and Anglo babies *poop* in *Pampers* until they learn to *go potty*. Babies also *piddle* or *piss*, and “pee-pee” is a widespread European children’s word for urine or urination (*faire pipi*, etc.) In English it’s also baby-talk for a baby boy’s penis—his “*PP*,” so to speak.

VII. The Primrose Path

When the boy grows up, his pee-pee stands up too, and then he’s a man. To speak of men’s firm and upright *characters*, we use the flattering TREE archetype, represented by T, whence *true*, *tough*, *stalwart*, *stern*. The stock name for a good man in fiction is *Tom*. But when we talk about men’s firm, upright *dicks*, we use the phallic P, and it is seldom flattering. At best, it’s matter-of-fact: *potency*, *prowess*, *performance*. The Greek god of male fertility and lasciviousness was called *Priapus* and always represented with an erect phallus. The randy P men who follow the god’s path through the field of sex are likewise led around, or led astray, by

their bulging dicks. At best, they're womanizers: "the philandering *Pierre*" in one book, *Pronek the Conqueror* in another, the fornicator *Pryanishnikov* in Tolstoy's story "The Devil."

If they're not womanizers, sexual P men are out-and-out *perverts* like *polygamists*, *prowlers*, *peeping Toms*, *pederasts*, and *pedophiles*. Or they're *passive* gay men: *poofs*, *ponces*, *punks*, *pansies*, formerly called *spintries*, *pogers*, *pathics*, and *prushuns*. (They haunted male brothels called *spearhouses*.) The title character of *Portnoy's Complaint* is a compulsive masturbator. Joyce Carol Oates' character Quentin *P.* is a child molester. So is Brian *Prentice* in Will Self's novel *The Butt*, who horrifies the story's decent hero Tom Brodzinski: "He found himself repeating his companion's name over and over in his mind: *Prentice, Prentice, Prentice*. . . . Until consonants were ground down, and Tom was thinking: *penis, penis, penis*."

Randy women can be P characters too. The devil in Tolstoy's story isn't Mr. *Pryanishnikov*, it's his friend's mistress Stepanida *Pechnikov*. Until the Sexual Revolution, any extramarital sex earned women a P. The adulteress in *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) is Hester *Prynne*. Honor Tracy's novel *Settled in Chambers* (1967) has both a *Prue* living in sin with a divorced artist and a presumed adulteress named Mary *Price*. Too much dick, you see—but women also get P names if they're not getting *any* dick, like *spinsters*. As the feminist Kate Millett asked, "Aren't women *prudes* if they don't and *prostitutes* if they do?" You bet, and the letter P has always been there to mock them. Ancient Greek for 'virgin' and 'whore' were *parthenos* and *porne*; in modern French they're *pucelle* and *pute*. Whores get the worst of it, of course. Over the centuries, English terms for prostitutes have included *public women*, *parnels*, *punks*, *paphians*, *pinchpins*, and *spoffokins*. Their bosses are *pimps*, *panders*, and *procurers*.

If you trace these chains of associations back to their source, you will see that all of these words are essentially phallic. The chief chain of associations is a short and terrible one that we all learn to understand quite early in life: 'phallus-vagina-whore', or *prick-pussy-prostitute*. Many languages besides English can reproduce this chain with P words alone, often in several different ways: Latin *penis-pudenda-prostituta*, Indonesian *peler-pukas-perek*, Spanish *pene-potorro-puta*, or *pijo-papaya-pelandusca*, and Polish *penis-pochwa-prostytutka*, or even *praćie-pipa-pipa* (*pipa* being both 'pussy' and 'slut').⁹ Don't blame the letter; the fault lies in human misogyny, which seems to be bred in the bone.

VIII. The Purple Weenie

Does every language have a P word for penis? No. But those that do generally have the same kind of line-up as English: the formal word is Latin *penis*, then there's a slangy P equivalent like *prick* or *pecker*, and then various other words with different first letters (*schlong*, *dick*, etc.). In German, for example, the line-up is *Penis*, *Pimmel*, *Schwanz*. In Danish it's *penis*, *pik*, *diller*. In Hungarian it's *pénisz*, *pöcs*, *fasz*. In Indonesian it's *penis*, *peler*, *burung*. You get the idea. The slangy P words are the interesting ones because they're all different: modern Greek *poutsas*, Yiddish *putz*, French *pine* or *popol*, Afrikaans *piel*, Romanian *pula*. Spanish is awash in regional variants: *polla*, *pijo*, *pija*, *pinga*, *pito*, *pico*; and so is Portuguese: *pau*, *pica*, *pinto*, *piça*, *pila*, *picha*, *pichota*, *pistola*, *piroca*.

English does pretty well too: *prick*, *pecker*, *peter*, *pee-pee*, and so on. For some numbers, let's consider Deborah Cameron's 1992 article "Naming of Parts." She collected 182 'penis' terms from American college students of both sexes.¹⁰ Twenty percent have P (or *sp-*) onsets: that's 37 terms, the most for any letter. (The next most frequent onsets are M, W,

and H, averaging 21 terms each. I count phrases like *meat spear* as both M and P; eight of the P onsets are in second or third elements.) Some of Cameron's terms are *love popsicle*, *pogo stick*, *passion rifle*, *pink torpedo*, *spoo gun*, *swelling passion*, *pud*, *the persuader*, *pipe*, *pole*, *python*, *slimy spelunker*, and *Peter Dinkie*. A few are corny, like *leaning tower of please-her*, and four are alliterative: *piece of pork*, *pulsating pole*, *pussy pleaser*, and *special purpose*. Male students preferred the weaponish names; women's names tended to be more playful.

Not everybody knows all these terms, obviously. *Pud* and *pole* are common, but *slimy spelunker* sounds ad hoc, like it was made up on the spot by one clever person and spread around by his or her acquaintances. To put it more accurately, I'd say the phrase was spontaneously generated by the PHALLUS archetype itself, using its signature letter P, and then spat out into the world through the mouth of its alleged human coiner. This happens all the time. A character in the movie *Porky's* says, "Hi! I'm *Paulie the Penis!*" Too blatant? Double entendres abound as well. Here are some I've noticed on television. An absent-minded guy in a sitcom asks, "Has anybody seen my *package?*" Titters. Director Wes Craven, a former English teacher, is asked to define *dangling participle*. "It's a big problem," he says, "for middle-aged men." The satirist Mark Russell calls America's missile-defense program "*projectile dysfunction*" and imagines a sex-change patient singing "I left my *part* in San Francisco."

Those get laughs, but understatement gets them too. On the sitcom *Everybody Loves Raymond*, the hero's brother Robert, a cop, arrives one morning to pick up Ray's young daughter. "She's bringing me to class today," he reminds the girl's mother, because "it's show-and-tell for things that begin with the letter P!" The mother turns and glares, the audience howls, and finally Robert, acutely embarrassed, gestures down at his . . . policeman's uniform. And everybody gets that joke as well. This fits Freud's working definition of something known unconsciously: "we can understand it without being taught anything about it." P means PHALLUS, and everybody understands that without being taught.

IX. Pretty Pictures

So much for P's sound. Now let's consider its shape. I say that P looks like a cock and balls, and I say that's no coincidence. Did it always look that way? No. It *evolved* to look that way, as we see below. In the earliest Semitic version of our alphabet, each letter was a picture of the A-is-for-Apple type. The word they used to illustrate the *p* sound was *pey*, which meant 'mouth' (and still does in modern Hebrew). Three thousand years ago, people drew this mouth letter either as an astonished oval like 0 or a smile facing right or left:) or (. Later the smile was stylized into a kind of candy cane: Ꞥ. In other words, if your name was Peter in those days, you'd write (eter or Ꞥeter. When the Greeks borrowed the Semitic alphabet from the Phoenicians, they quickly substituted two new shapes. Eastern Greeks near Athens lengthened the candy cane's right leg to match the left, turning Ꞥ into modern Greek pi Π, which looks like a tiny lighthouse. Western Greeks near Italy closed the cane's loop and made Ꞥ into P. Their Roman neighbors copied that shape and eventually bequeathed it to us.

0, (, Ꞥ	Π	P
Early Semitic <i>pey</i>	Greek Pi	Roman P

Why did the Greeks change the shape? Nobody knows, but here's a guess. If a letter's a picture,

the old *p*-is-for-mouth didn't mean anything to the Greeks, who had their own words for mouth. But their new candy cane looked a bit phallic, and the Greeks did have two *p* words for 'penis', *peos* and *posthe*.¹¹ Why not redraw the letter to match? In Athens the candy cane became a tall cylinder Π. Out west it became a cock-and-balls P. That suited the Romans too, because they had their own *p*-word *penis*. And of course it still works for us—and we're so fond of its shape that we recycle it in the four small letters *q*, *p*, *d*, *b*! As a culture, we're far too proper to admit that we might have a penis in our alphabet, but every once in a while somebody notices the resemblance and brings it to light. For example, the old porn ad I've sketched in Fig. 1 cleverly turns the capital P's hole into an anatomically correct echo of the letter itself.



Figure 1

Do other alphabets have penises in them? Yes. The Hebrew name for Z, *zayin*, originally meant 'sword', but nowadays it's Israeli slang for 'penis'. The Hebrew letter is written ז, which can look like either object if you squint really hard. But I was thinking more of Egyptian hieroglyphics, which employed two unmistakable cock-and-balls symbols that Sir Alan Gardiner's standard sign list designates as D52 and D53.¹² In Fig. 2 we see hieroglyph D52, which the Egyptians used to write their words for male creatures like men and bulls. D53 is the same except that it shows a drop of liquid coming out of the tip; this was used in the words for urinating, ejaculating, and screwing—and also for the concepts of 'before' and 'in front of', like Latin *pre-* and *pro-*. It's not entirely clear how D52 and D53 were pronounced, but neither of them seem to have been *p* words, except in their shapes and meanings.



Figure 2

With that in mind, let's turn to the world's other great system of picture-writing, the Chinese. It would be too much to hope that the Chinese words for 'penis' would be *ping* or *pao*, or that they would be written as neat little towers like the Greek pi Π. And they aren't. But we do meet some old friends among the real Chinese words. You may have noticed how many non-P Western words like *dong* have D or sL onsets (alveolar and therefore 'linear') and/or

rimes in *-ng* ('round'): *dong*, *dick*, *diller*, *schlong*, *lingam*, *burung*. We see these in Chinese too: 'penis' is *diao*, *liao*, or *yinjing*, *yangju*, *yangdao*. You already know bits of the last three terms. See the syllables *yin*, *yang*, and *dao* as in *Daoism*? Same old words. *Yangdao*, the penis, is the Male Way (and *yindao*, the Female Way, is the vagina).



Figure 3



Figure 4

But look how they're written! Fig. 3 shows the character for *yangdao*. See the P-like thing at the extreme left? It's also used in the characters for *yangju* and *yinjing*. And see that other P-like thing that arches over Fig. 4? It appears in both *diao* and *liao*. These two P-like things are called "radicals," a technical term for any of the two hundred conventional shapes that provide a visual "root" for every Chinese character.¹³ Like Egyptian hieroglyphs, each Chinese radical has a number. The dented P-like shape in Fig. 3 is radical 170, and the swooshy-tailed one in Fig. 4 is number 44.

Now, let me emphasize neither of these radicals have any historical connection to Egypt's hieroglyphs or the Roman alphabet. They're Chinese through and through, and there was nothing phallic about their origins. In their most ancient forms, radical 170 showed a set of steps going up a hill, and 44 showed a seated person seen from the left, the rectangular part being the torso. I would simply suggest that, somewhat like our letter P, these radicals have been co-opted by the PHALLUS archetype because it found their present shapes appropriate for its purposes. Of all 214 Chinese radicals, only three remotely resemble our letter P, and two of them show up in the commonest Chinese words for penis. Coincidence? Poppycock! The PHALLUS is at home everywhere.

Endnotes

¹ www.herbadoth.com, March 8, 2007.

² John Lawler, "Women, Men, and Bristly Things," *Michigan Working Papers in Linguistics* (1990).

³ A.H. Fremont, *Alphabet Flip Chart* (1974).

⁴ This and the later Freud quote (on understanding without being taught) are from "Symbolism in Dreams," Chapter 10 in *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, translated by Joan Riviere (1924). Italics in the original.

⁵ In English and other Germanic languages where F replaced earlier P, this whole chain of ideas is also represented by a parallel set of F words. Latin *primary* has a match in our native word *first*, related to German *Fürst* 'prince.' *Fore*, *forth*, *forward* mean 'out front'. *Former* is 'early'. 'Spear' itself was anciently *franca*, whence the tribal name of *Franks* (or 'Spears') who settled France. Same with P's 'spreading' words: French *plancher* matches *floor*; *plain/plane* matches *flat*, and *pancakes* can also be called *flapjacks* or *flannel cakes*. In Arabic, which suffered a similar P-to-F switch long ago, the letter P is now missing entirely, so all its work must be reallocated to F and B: *Filastin* for *Palestine*, *Babba* for *Papa*.

⁶ Margaret Magnus, *What's in a Word? Evidence for Phono-Semantics* (privately printed, 1993).

⁷ Madeleine Gray and Kate Millett quotes in Elaine Partnow's *The Quotable Woman* (1978).

⁸ Francine du Plessix Gray, *At Home with the Marquis de Sade* (1998).

⁹ For foreign terms, www.yourswear.com is casual, www.bab.la is more scholarly.

¹⁰ Deborah Cameron, "Naming of Parts," *American Speech* 67.

¹¹ As well as *phallus*. Ancient Greek *ph* was not *f*. It was an emphatic sound /p^h/ with its own letter phi (Φ). We say *fallus*, but in ancient Greek and Latin, *phallus* sounded like *palace*, and the phallic *pharos* ('lighthouse') sounded like the naughty *Paris*.

¹² For Gardiner's sign list, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_hieroglyphs/D.

¹³ An excellent interactive dictionary for Chinese words and characters is www.mdbg.net/chindict. For an interactive list of radicals, www.yellowbridge.com/Chines/radicals.php. The third radical that looks like P is 26, which is sort of a smoothed-out 170. Radical 163 can also be written 170 under certain circumstance.

* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Many Musics

Ninth Series

“Open hands, touch, & teach others how”

i. Flutter

Tonight I listen for the flutter to go.
 Less than a hum, a low whistle,
 less than a something, a key-shaped
 declivity in the ether, humbling clue.

It was another dream of sand set me to go.
 This one a test, the several questions,
 fingering grains to conjure answer,
 & in the right order: Forgive. Understand. Reconcile.

And now the path, past my dreams,
 & every foolish hour. Came where I should,
 in this graying dusk, & now to listen,
 now to watch, wait & watch, *there*—
 A pink nose, glowing fur, parting through grass,
 a way not a way, just the flutter to go.

ii. By Way of Reply

Arrived here from so many hours & miles,
 I remember hard two. One is your greasy brow,
 your sweaty face, playing a game you love
 but maybe not enough. You want to sing,
 shape the air to your music, color exposed
 the cankers in your heart, if not fill
 or efface them all. I watch from
 the sidelines, a backup reporter with
 little interest until you collide into me
 & we collapse in pains & mud.

Years later, I dream we are talking
 on the phone, trying to explain
 our lost friendship, understand the moment
 when mud becomes dust, understand
 anything at all. A turn & I am in
 a vast coffeehouse in San Francisco,
 several floors, rooms doored by old
 patchwork curtains, a couch the color
 of badly dyed red hair, thin covers-less
 books of poetry heaped together between bricks.

I'm glad we moved here, I think, finally,
 after living so many other places.
 San Francisco, I think gladly, at last.

When I wake, we're not in or bound
 for San Francisco. And you are still
 my friend, waking in your own home,
 with your loving wife like mine.

And I am in the Gate, still, too,
 & it reminds me that the old truism
 about diminishing numbers of doors
 through the years is laziness worse
 than lies. Look left, look right, mind
 & look ahead. They're swinging every
 which way, a shaggy spectral music at the ready.

iii. Empty Ballpark

The black kitten, so tiny in her long blue top hat,
 sleeps on a scrap of cardboard I found,
 or sometimes on the edge of my hand.
 We cannot decide if she is my dream,
 either of us, but she remains close in my hours.

I'm trying to understand what any of this is,
 as I always have, did. I saw clouds in the
 skies, when a child, as frames to mysteries
 embedded in the blue. The ways lamps
 reflected on windows, in my first heartbreak,
 & the next, seemed a secret warm pattern to things.

Faces in crowds befuddled me, each one dry
 & no hint of the tinder within. Perhaps something
 when wrapped in a book, or a letter. I watched lamps
 deeper into reflections, listened. Watched lover
 after lover sleep in my bed, gentle as demised.
 The black kitten came, then the blue top hat.

Or the other way. I travelled the last carriage
 out of town, walked & walked, found
 an empty ballpark. A scrap of cardboard.
 Or the edge of my hand. Sleeping without answer,
 or question. A trust in me. I step from the ground,
 finally, balancing her as my all.

iv. Big Dreams

I awake. Really alone. You're both gone.
 I have nothing left but the Gate.
 I don't know what this means but
 it's my only way on now. This great bed,
 that large table, the plain table & chair.

The last time I saw you, the last time
 we curled half-nude, watching TV,
 you relaxed, you smiled with me.
 You had translucent shades on your windows,
 to let the stars & streetlights in,
 but obscurely. I was not your lover.

We formed a circle, you & me & him,
 we tendered each other, I was not your lover,
 nor his, we were sugar water on
 each other's tongues, colluding flames
 in each other's hearts. I joined you, & you,
 I stayed, & then remained, & then no more.

There is light on the water outside,
 I struggle to think dawn or dusk.
 Those mountains are always white-capped
 so I do not know the season. Those evergreens
 tell little more, but I am a man &
 so yearn to know. I am a man &
 knowing is a hole I try to fill. I am a man &
 I miss you for all your cruelties,
 you final lies, your lingering tenderness.

I was not your lover that last long night
 when we finally all twisted into bed,
 when we made each other come new stars
 into the hours & skies. I was not your lover
 when the juices of our bodies commingled
 & no god could tell us apart. I was not your lover
 but I am a man & I am still trying to fill
 that hole, see through your translucent shades
 into your heart, hearts, three, two, one,
 & I am awake. Really alone. You're gone.



* * * * *



In the Secret Place of Thunder

[Travel Journal]

Two days later I flew from Mexico City to Quito, Ecuador's capital. I joined the South American Explorers Club and spent an afternoon reading in its library. I decided to visit two tribes, the Sionas and the Huaoranis. The Sionas, because an anthropologist wrote that their shamans were the most powerful ones, the most knowledgeable in the drinking of *yagé*—that was their word for ayahuasca, pronounced ya-HEY. The anthropologist went on that the Siona shamans instructed by singing their visions directly into the cups of *yagé* that their apprentices drank. Novice drinkers were expected to scream, writhe, vomit, and shit themselves in their hammocks.

I decided to visit the Huaoranis because of what Jeremy Carver had said and because they were the wildest tribe around. I wanted to see human life in the most archaic form possible. Maybe Nenke, the shaman Jeremy told me about, would want to take my on as an apprentice.

I read that the Huaoranis were divided into two groups: the regular, semi-civilized Huaoranis, who numbered about 1200, and a splinter group called Tagaeris, of whom there were only a few dozen. After a dispute in the late 1960s, the Tagaeris had retreated deep into the forest, where they lived in a state of war with the others.

In the 1980s there was a move to search for oil on land occupied by the Tagaeris. Oil exploration would have led to violence between them and the oil workers, as it had in other places where oil companies had worked Huaorani land. The Capuchin bishop of the jungle town of Coca, a Basque named Alejandro Labaka, was a seasoned veteran of missionary work with Huaoranis. He'd walked naked-but-for-a-string in the forest with them, he'd been adopted by a Huaorani family, he'd learned to speak like them. So in 1987, he decided to attempt peaceful contact with the Tagaeris in advance of the search for oil. He and a nun, Inés Arango, had themselves dropped off by helicopter at a Tagaeri settlement. Five days later, when the helicopter crew returned, they found Labaka and Arango's bodies spread-eagled, naked, on the ground, each pierced with about a dozen spears.

Before going out there, Labaka had composed a letter that was to be opened in case of his death. In it, he asked that there be no oil exploration in the area if the Tagaeri killed him and Arango. His wishes were respected. He and Arango had sacrificed their lives to protect their own killers. In the photograph of him lying dead in Coca, he was gently smiling.

In the Explorers Club library I read about raids that tribes used to make on other ones—killing the men, stealing the women. A woman could be taken away and, on the way to the raiders' village, gang-raped by all of them. I imagined the scene with ethical horror and kinky desire and thought of the hunter-gatherers in everyone's bloodlines not many generations back.

From Quito, I flew to a jungle town called Lago Agrio, north of Coca, in search of Sionas. On the flight I made friends with three Californians, Jim, Samantha, and Randy, all

older than me. They invited me to join them on a tour of Cuyabeno National Park, which overlapped Siona territory.

On the street in Lago Agrio, as we started looking for a tour agency, we were approached by a suave *mestizo* with a broad smile that showed he was missing an eyetooth. He introduced himself as Vicente Hernández, a rainforest guide, and he started trying to sell us a tour. My companions brushed him off, wanting to go with an established agency, but Hernandez kept talking and finally got their attention. A dozen passersby gathered to watch the activity. They laughed when I told them I only hoped we were almost as interesting as a television show. I didn't pay much attention to the negotiations. The Californians were bargaining hard. I would settle for whatever they decided on with Vicente, or whoever else they went with. I was trying to move through the world with the smooth grace I'd had on that day on peyote in San Luis Potosí. Whatever life presented, I'd accept.

Vicente offered, "I'll take you to a Secoya shaman who sometimes drinks *yagé* with tourists." The Secoyas, I'd read, were a tribe closely related to the Sionas. Maybe their shamans were almost as good as the Siona ones. It's like Huichols and Coras, I reflected. Sometimes you get Sionas, sometimes you get Secoyas. My companions were uninterested in drinking *yagé* but curious to meet a shaman. I'd read that shamans who drank *yagé* with tourists weren't particularly reputable. But maybe meeting this Secoya would be a step in the right direction. At least Vicente seemed capable of getting us into the rainforest.

Negotiations moved to Vicente's cement-walled apartment, which he shared with his stunningly attractive wife and three young daughters. We stayed late into the evening. The deal in its final form stipulated a five-day tour for \$30 per person per day, except it would be \$25 for me, and I'd have to do some chores. Together with Vicente, Samantha wrote down a schedule, tightly organized, hour by hour, day by day. The guide would pick us up at 7:00 the following morning.

At 8:00 sharp he appeared with a bright, gap-toothed smile outside our hotel accompanied by two pickup truck taxis. His wife and daughters and their baggage and their kitchen stove and a tank of gas and crates of food and dishes were in one taxi, while the other was empty, waiting for us and our gear. At 9:05 the whole expedition shoved off in a motor canoe at the entrance of Cuyabeno National Park. At 9:30 we had to turn around and get a different canoe because something was wrong with this one's motor. The schedule was history. I was quietly glad to have it out of the way.

Laden with nine people and their goods, the new canoe rode low in the water and leaked through the seams. My task was to bail with an empty two-liter Sprite bottle that had been cut into a bucket shape.

I wrote in my notebook: *"A big toucan above us on a limb. High gray cloud cover with blue cracks in it. Bright yellow-white fuzz where the sun is. Above the notebook, brown water with gray sky reflection speeds past my feet. Blue flash of a morpho butterfly. The sky's clearing up. Jim lights a cigarette and goofs off. Sunlight coming through now. Primordial. Capybara tracks in the mud where we stopped to pee. Monkeys visible for a moment just now. Samantha half-laughs through her nose at Jim's antics. Jim whistles, Randy writes in his journal, Samantha chews gum and watches the forest."*

"The wind from the canoe's motion is soft on my ankles. Cold drops of spray hit my feet. Half a moon in the morning sky like an eggshell made of cloud. Vines like violin notes hanging down into the river. Parrots fly overhead squawking."

In the evening we stopped in an empty hut on a lagoon. Vicente cut nettles with his machete and used them to whack his back. He said everyone in the jungle did it: it relieved sore muscles. I tried it and, with a little imagination, could feel it working. When it was dark, and we had eaten abundantly from Vicente's wife's adequate cooking as her little daughters lounged on their laps, Vicente brought us outside and down to the water. He shone a light out into the darkness and said he could see the reflections of caiman eyes out there. He grunted to call them nearer and slowly they came, pairs of gleams peering at the humans from within the black water. I started imitating Vicente's grunts to call the beasts. He said, "You sound like you're trying to crap." Afterwards, lying down to sleep, the black water of my mind rocked with the movement of hundred-foot-long swimming reptiles.

On the second day we went further into the park. As the sun built a nest of gold in my brown hair, I hunched over my notebook again. *"Vicente caught a huge catfish by leaving a line in the river during the night. His wife is cleaning it now. Their daughters are making string figures.*

"Twittering birdcalls through the canopy. Leaves like round, flat hands with the sun shining weakly through. I dreamt there was a toll-free number you could call if you had any carrion and the dispatcher would send a vulture. Then I invited Lily out on a date but there were two of her and they got jealous of each other. When I awoke in the night, I heard Samantha growling in her sleep.

"Off goes the motor and on goes the sweet song of rippling water and far birdcalls and the psychic vibrations of cicadas. A glimpse of blue sky. Trees reaching far out over the river for light. Other trees overreach themselves or are undermined by the river and end up in the drink.

"Traveling again. Jim was briefly stuck in the mud after a crap. Macaws squawking wildly, lazily in the trees behind me. Vines trailing in the water, other vines not quite there yet. Samantha cracks her knuckles, whistles a couple notes, and goes back to writing. A dragonfly speeds briefly alongside the boat. We pass through the shadow of a tree. The sun swings to the left and right behind me as we round a curve. Cloud blurs the shadow of my hand on the page. The shadow of my hand appears and disappears as if I myself were appearing and disappearing. Three levels of cloud I can see above us now, and between them, past them, outer space thronged with imperceptible intelligences. Leaves glistening with water, water glistening. The clouds are full of Chinese dragons coiling and uncurling in slow motion. The sun licks me suddenly, ferociously, hotly rubs its white fur against my skin. Samantha smears the whiteness of sun block on her smooth brown legs and the low clouds are flying."

On the third day of the tour, it started to dawn on me that the only shaman who was likely to drink *yagé* with me was one who would drink with tourists, because, *de facto*, like it or not, I was a tourist. On the fourth day I became convinced of this.

On the fifth day, after we had motored out of Cuyabeno National Park and onto the Aguarico River, Vicente cut the motor and the canoe ground to a halt in the sand of a riverbank above which lived Don Joaquín Piaguaje, the Secoya shaman. Atop the embankment appeared two skinny hunting dogs barking furiously. One was white and tan, the other black. Soon, the shaman himself appeared, barefoot, barrel-chested, wearing a purple tunic that came down to his shins. He had a short, military-style haircut like the one my Uncle Pat had worn, while there was something Tibetan about his narrow eyes, prominent cheekbones, and broad flat nose. He exchanged a few words with Vicente and invited everyone up. The guide leaped out and dragged the canoe higher up onto the small beach, then sank a pole deep into the sand and tied the canoe to the pole. The rest of us scrambled ashore and up the embankment to a flat area. There they climbed a pair of notched logs into don Joaquín's hut, which was on



posts, two meters off the ground. Joaquín's wife Maribel was there, a plump woman with very long, wavy black hair and a brilliant smile. We made ourselves comfortable on a firm, yielding floor that Vicente said was made of split palm wood. Maribel opened an aluminum pot full of mashed, boiled ripe plantain and spooned some of it out into aluminum bowls, added water to each and mixed well, and handed one to each guest. Joaquín and Vicente chatted about their common acquaintances. Immersed in the soothing flavor of the sweet plantain drink, I relaxed. Joaquín seemed intelligent and accessible. Above his lively eyes, his eyebrows seemed to have been plucked out. After a short conversation, the shaman showed us around his garden. I trailed behind him, observing his swaying back underneath the arching leaves, and thought I wanted to follow him down the path for a while.

Up in the hut again, his companions examined some necklaces and bracelets made from local materials that Maribel was offering for sale. I mustered my courage and addressed the shaman, "Don Joaquín, I hear you sometimes drink *yagé* with tourists. Would you do that with me?"

"It's fine," he replied in strongly-accented, precisely-enunciated Spanish. "You go downriver to the village and staying with my relatives there for two nights. Come back on Sunday morning and we drinking Sunday night."

I caught a ride with a passing canoe down to the village. Vicente and his family and Jim and Randy and Samantha wished me well and went on without me.

The village was named Secoya. The village center had a dozen huts plus a school. Other homes that pertained to it were more isolated in the forest. I stayed with Joaquín's daughter-in-law's brother, a placid, smooth-faced man named Gervasio Piaguaje. He was trying to develop a tourism business in connection with some acquaintances from Quito. He was studying a basic English textbook. He recognized that pronunciation was a problem, so he had me tape record myself reading the whole book. Afterwards, he told me about the history of the Secoyas' community here on the Aguarico River and about their language.

He said the tribe had originally come from territory that now belongs to Peru. At the end of the 1930s, the people who then comprised the group that lives here now were enslaved to a man who forced them to tap rubber for him. During the 1940-1941 war between Peru and Ecuador they escaped and emigrated to Cuyabeno, a week's journey through the forest. In the 1960s, a missionary couple from the United States came and Christianized them. That led to the gradual disappearance of the *yagé* ceremony. In 1973 the group migrated up the Aguarico because there was higher-quality soil here for their gardens.

As he spoke I remembered the dolphin skeleton cloud and my certainty that I'd been called to the forest by shamans active around the time of his conception.

Gervasio's lesson to me in Paicoca, the Secoyas' language:

It has twelve vowels: a, e, i, o, u, ē, ā, ē, ī, ō, ū, ë. The underlined ones are nasal. The language is written with a system based on that of Spanish. For example, the letter ñ is used for the sound "ny," and the letter j is used for the sound of an English h.

Ao: white flatbread made of yuca. It's slightly sour and very hard when eaten dry. Best soaked in soup broth. Yuca is a root vegetable, starchy like a potato, but large, long and white, with a thick skin that's chopped and pried off before the yuca is boiled.

Yai: jaguar.

Wai: meat.

Siaya: river.

Siaya wai: fish.

Jai siaya: big river: the Aguarico.

Pai: people. The “p” is close to a “b,” and the “i” is nasal, so it could also be written “bai,” “pain,” or “bain.” In English orthography it would be something like “pine” or “bine” with the n only half-pronounced—halfway to “pie” or “buy.”

Paicoca: the peoples’ speech.

Airo pai: forest people. Po pai, white people. Nea pai, black people.

Piaguaje, a family name: *pia*, little bird; *guaje*, pronounced a bit like wahey, fresh, young, green. Payaguaje, the other major Secoya family name: *paya*, oil on the skin of the face. They were named that because people said they were strong shamans, and in the ceremony, their faces would become oily, a sign of their power.

Nata wahë (or *guaje*): Good morning—literally, morning fresh.

Hn-hn: Yes. I could spell it jn-jn because of the Spanish orthography. It sounds just like hm-hm with the m’s replaced with n’s. The stress is on the second hn.

Pani: No.

Deóji, pronounced *dayóhee*: Thank you.

On Sunday morning Gervasio delivered me back to Joaquín’s place, where I found the shaman chopping firewood. Joaquín wouldn’t accept my help. With a machete, he cut two meter-long, wrist-thick sections of a *yagé* vine that was growing on a pair of tall trees behind his house. With a wooden mallet he pounded the vine sections so the bark came off and they opened up a little. They turned from yellow-brown to orange as they oxidized in the air. He chopped them into short lengths and boiled them in a huge aluminum pot together with leaves he gathered from another vine that he called *yagé ocó*, water *yagé*.

A neighbor from across the river stopped by and Joaquín arranged for me to catch a ride with him out of Secoya territory the following morning.

We talked all day. Joaquín’s Spanish was idiosyncratic, the language of someone who has spoken it a bit incorrectly for many decades. Sometimes my attention was drawn to the surface of what he was saying, sometimes to the content. He told me his parents both died when he was very small, and his grandparents raised him. His grandfather gave him *yagé* when he was still a boy. He wept and had visions for three days and nights. “It’s very important, crying,” he said, tipping his head back, looking at me. “Getting everything out.”

I told him about my few LSD and mushroom experiences, and how I’d liked them but always felt the setting was wrong. The shaman nodded, “*A Usted le gusta chumar. Usted será un buen hombre.*” “You like to trip. You’ll be a good man.”

I knew the verb “*chumar*” from my reading, but this was the first time I’d heard it used. It was derived from the name of an Andean hallucinogen, the San Pedro cactus, known to the indigenous people as *achuma*. “*A Usted le gusta chumar,*” I repeated to myself. It pleases you to choom. The word’s onomatopoeic, like peyote. A sound effect from a comic book: someone plunging into the astral plane: CHOOM! Joaquín’s statement lightened my heart, and not just because of the verb. I told him I was fed up with feeling like a criminal for wanting to trip in the United States. The shaman responded that he came from a society where the most valued men were the best *yagé* drinkers, and where if you didn’t stay up all night drinking and chanting for the good of the tribe, you were considered lazy and useless.

Even so, he noted, *yagé* drinkers were sometimes persecuted. “There was a shaman,”

Joaquín said, “who was accused of harming people with his magic, because people were getting sick and dying. In fact, he was doing all he could to save lives, to drive off the evil that was attacking his community. But because he was powerful, some within the community suspected him, and prepared to kill him. Then one day, some strangers paddled down out of the sky in canoes.”

“They paddled down out of the sky in canoes?” I echoed, unsure if I was understanding correctly.

“That’s right. They were paddling canoes in the sky, and they paddled down and landed on the earth. The shaman got into one of those canoes. Then they paddled back up into the sky, taking him away with them. The people on earth never saw the shaman again. And the disease continued to take its toll, and they realized it had not been his doing.”

The objection to hallucinogens where I came from was that they could cause brain damage or insanity. But the objection to hallucinogens here, I realized, was that they might make the user powerful and evil.

The sun was setting. Joaquín plucked a spiky, green seedpod from a bush near his hut, and now, as the last light of the day played in the treetops, he opened it with his fingers. Achote, he said it was called. I saw an oily, bright red juice around the seeds inside. The shaman broke off a long, narrow sliver of palm wood from one of the posts of the hut, rubbed it in the juice, and used it to print diagonal lines and asterisks on my forehead and cheeks and on his own. “This means,” he said, “we’re children of the sky.”

He said we’d be silent for an hour before drinking. We rested, me on a low wooden stool, him in an old hammock. On the other side of the hut Maribel and their little granddaughter Xiomara hung a big mosquito net over some mats and blankets and lay down to sleep.

Although I was close to my goal of trying ayahuasca, I became downcast. In the past, all the men in the village would have assembled to drink. Now it was just one old guy and a tourist. Pathetic. The missionaries had won. The tradition was dead. Maybe I could find the Sionas later.

Darkness. Joaquín lit a kerosene lamp, then filled a plastic mug with the brown brew and chanted over it. I’d never heard anything like that chant. It was wobbly, like a canoe on the river, like a hammock, like the flame that dimly lit the inside of the hut. The shaman drank, then poured a cup for me and chanted into it and handed it to me. The liquid I choked down was bitter as peyote. Were there visions in it? Forty minutes passed. Joaquín picked up a kind of fan made of a bundle of spearhead-shaped leaves and shook it as he chanted his wobbly, rhythmic music. He broke off and growled like a jaguar. The back of my neck prickled. He resumed singing. The growl had seemed natural, unself-conscious. Bizarre. Any time I’d heard someone imitate an animal, it had sounded contrived.

The music stopped again. “Are you feeling the *yagê*?”

“No.”

“Do you want another cup?”

“Please.”

Half an hour later, wondering if I was going to choom, I glanced up at the palm-frond ceiling. By the light of the kerosene lamp, the ceiling’s vibrating. Or I am. I feel tremendously altered. I try to speak, but can only sing: “This is the strongest hallucinogen I’ve ever taken.” What’s happening through me? I vibrate. Earlier I felt sad that there were only the two of us. Now the night is drenched with consciousness. Every thought every being has ever

had here pulses in the air. The fact that only two human bodies are present is inconceivable. Joaquín's voice is like millions chanting together.

Before long, nausea hits, an exclamation point, a warning sign. "I have to vomit," I mutter. Earlier Joaquín said I could puke off the side of the hut if I needed to. Now, though, he sits up in his hammock and snaps, "Don't vomit! Keep it down!"

"I can't," I groan, and make for the edge of the hut, and crouch there, breathing deeply, balancing on the balls of my feet, seething with a thunderous energy.

"Don't fall," urges Joaquín from behind me. "Don't fall."

In a voice far deeper than my ordinary one, I respond, "Sometimes the human doesn't fall." Together with the *yagé*, a tremendous force surges from the tip of my tailbone up my spine. As the body expels the bitter liquid into the darkness, it emits a deep, choking groan. Another surge of the nausea brings up *yagé* and a fiery gleaming energy that I roar with, louder and clearer now with the sign of victory. Another convulsion of my stomach and I'm empty, pure, and I roar and roar in defiance of everything that has ever sullied my soul.

Something's happening behind me. Under the hut, the two dogs are barking at me, alarmed about the large mammal roaring up here. Joaquín and his wife are shushing them. Not shushing me, because, as I've read, it's expected that novice *yagé* drinkers will make a lot of noise, but the dogs. I pause and say to the dogs in a normal tone of voice, in English, "Be quiet, it's just a human acting crazy on *yagé*." They immediately fall silent and I resume roaring undisturbed.

I make my way back and put a questioning hand on the rope of Joaquín's old hammock. The shaman makes room for me and I recline next to him facing the other way. Separated by a taut fold of net-like palm fiber mesh, our left hips pressed together, we take turns singing. His songs inspire and respond to my thoughts. For my part I improvise, sing "wavy" to a simple tune, ask "Oh, really?" in a dozen different ways, cooing it, growling it, shouting it like a come-cry. I become surrounded by and filled with thunder and I boom at the top of my lungs. The spirit of thunder has come to visit, to celebrate, to bellow through a human body. When this happened to the Vikings, they called it Thor. He's here. Greetings, Lord Thor. Blessings and explosions.

Later, I rave spontaneous neologisms, thinking, *Why settle for words that have already been spoken? Our nature is to create language, not just repeat it.*

In *yagé*, I go on, I've found my life's work. I'll report on this, I'll analyze it, I'll let others contemplate through the lens of my mind this profound natural magic.

During these hours of trance and song, Joaquín and I establish an unspoken telepathic bond. It's clear that we'll work together as student and teacher. Our minds join like two bubbles joining at the surface of water, like two candle flames that become one when held together. We're one man in two bodies.

Around two in the morning, interspersing falsetto squeals with guttural growls, I inadvertently snap some of the worn out palm fiber strings on my side of the old hammock and fall through nearly to the floor. I'm just holding myself in by my elbows. This evokes a cascade of awful thoughts. I'm clumsy. I've killed this hammock. I can't be trusted with people's things. Worse, it's not just me, it's everyone. When we enjoy ourselves too much, we lose control. Gays get AIDS from having too much fun without protection. Uncle Pat had too much to drink and died in a car crash. With a heavy sigh, my ass inches from the floor, I silently swear to be cautious and never too happy.

Joaquín's voice, infinitely gentle, reaches me: "*Aguántalo, aguántalo.*" Deal with it, don't let it get you down.

Dealing with it as best I can, I clamber out of the broken hammock and wrap a blanket around myself and fall asleep on the floor.

Over breakfast, I wondered if there had really been a telepathic bond. I said, "You know, I have this plan to visit the Huaoranis south of here, but part of me would like to stay around here and study with you."

Without missing a beat, Joaquín replied, "If you want to study with me, come back another year and stay with us for two months. Bring me multicolored glass beads and a trunk that locks for me to keep my clothes in."

The neighbor's outboard motor was purring in the river below. I'd never discussed a price for the ceremony with the shaman. How could you put a price on something like that? I took out my wallet and handed Joaquín a wad of bills without counting it; he accepted it and put it away without counting it. Then I didn't see him again for eighteen months.

* * * * *





**Lunar Therapy**

So if you can move all the hurt and dark
away from the head and heart
in a mindful sweep to the sky,
if you can forget all selves
all others all choices all worlds
just let the immersive white light
noiselessly swamp and purge
whatever is sticking to your feet,
you may then fall asleep for a night
and a day and a thousand years more.

* * *

Ode to a Mockingbird

Dear mockingbird,
pull us from our stony ledges
into the melodic torrents
crashing at your soft charcoal throat.
Give us proper voice to sing out
the quickening leaps and dirges
of the era we're perched in.
Mockingbird,
teach us again to just shut down and sit
within the wild grace of your mimicry.
Much has been said already—
how do we begin to go deeper?
Mockingbird,
lift us to the next branch of kinship
where all paths conjoin and glimmer.
The earth is a network
whose truths and hearts
are meant to expand.
Dear mockingbird,
bury us gaily with daily recreation.
A stack of notes from the edge of the chimney
and we'll merge, mend, release.

* * *

Spirit Animal

Remember that first morning
a hawk spoke to you?
Sitting crosslegged
on a cold slab of ledge
a penetrating wind
lifting oak leaf from branch
the dog poised as sentry
nose to the northwest
and a hunger so tender
deep down in the earth
high up in the sky
its force had no choice
but to break in and speak.

* * *

Au Revoir

What I miss most about smoking
 is the way it infused time and space
 with reprieve and emptiness
 in one short puff of silver and gold.
 I miss its private salutations to nebula and ant,
 steeple and rainspout—prayers launched daily
 away from the buildings beyond the fences
 within the thrum of a steel-blue haze
 beneath a calm drape of nicotine.
 I miss its huddle with a fellow smoker on a retaining wall
 a park bench a ledge of granite a stoop a balcony
 a cupola a crater of the moon
 because intimacy can't be shuttered
 where there's smoke there's contact
 and words and laughter will billow and scroll.
 And yes, the stereotypical after sex cigarette,
 a truly most dear and fulfilling pleasure,
 a languid coda inhaled deeply, exhaled sweetly,
 for and by a fortunate two.
 My deepest immersions when smoke and I
 snared, enjambed and sanctified
 a precinct of the mind both empyrean and squalid—
 a placeholder for eternity
 until a cluster of words shot through the clearing.
 Tobacco, you were an astonishingly
 versatile framing device—
 a plume of heat and grace—
 that a killer like you can yet evoke
 all the music and none of the ash—
 dark wonder of a friend, thank you,
 but it's over, we've unraveled,
 I will miss you forever—amen.

* * * * *

Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Notes from New England

[Commentary]

*"Please accept this ragged purse
of high notes."*

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), then revived in issue 59 (October 2006) as Notes from the Northwest, & appearing since issue 75 (October 2010) under its original title. It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, and perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.

Dream Raps, Volume One

I Am Immersed

You know... you know... you know... It's like, it's like this. I, you, but let's say you, fall asleep and instead of just sleeping, a bodily rest, a stillness, I fall into the most complex stories. Strange, surreal, yet vivid. Vivid. And for the stretch of the really vivid ones, the especially vivid ones, the ones they say come near dawn, if you sleep overnight, I'm as immersed in the reality of what is happening as I will be when the alarm goes off and I wake up. Just as immersed, just as real. In all ways. Just as vivid. And so, why is this important activity that happens to every single human being somehow left behind upon leaving bed and entering the human world?

When You Run in Dreams

Sometimes when you run in dreams, from somewhere to somewhere, then you find yourself doing it again. The plot doubles, narrative or anti-narrative. I suppose it depends on what terms you try to apply to what happens in dreams now. What would be interesting and oh, probably someone out there has done it, is to say *OK, what if you extracted the rules from within the event itself, the events, if you would call them events.* And that might be interesting.

But what catches me every time, and what I haven't been able to figure out, is how in waking, there's so much conflict in action and purpose and yet everyone, even other kinds of beings, we all dream. And I wonder, is this somewhere to start? I mean is there something to this? Is there some kind of fresh ground to work with here? There are certainly tribes that value dreams more than we, in the West, do, incorporate them. But I wonder if you brought all the powers to bear, that exist in the Western world, the science, the technology, the thinkers, the leaders,

the freaks, if you brought dreams up from their obscure place, to a place on high, well, what would come?

Tired Mind, Dream Narrative

The strange thing are the dreams where a body's exhausted, but the mind generates powerful, surreal narratives. Dream narratives. And the body lies there, exhausted, sucking on sleep, like a dry throat water. But the mind, *oh the mind doesn't stop*. The mind does not stop in the least. *Pounds away*. And in the morning, when in a sense mind and body reunite, via waking consciousness, the body, refreshed for the sleep, but the mind trying to recall the dreams can't. What were those powerful images? Can't recall them. The body was too tired. Somehow, the body participates in the dream recall. Does the body participate in the dreams? Does the body dream? Does the body dream?

Body Asleep vs. Body Awake

You know, I guess you could say, I've been trying to figure this thing out for a long time. It's this question of what exactly, what works, what can explain the relation between the body in sleep and the body awake. Now it seems as though there are two explanations. Two. That's right.

There's the waking explanation, which pushes a sort of kind of linear narrative rooted in time and space. Now there are all sorts of exceptions, there's all sorts of things you can talk to, there's all sorts of stories you can tell all sorts of people. You can point toward and say *but*? And yet, most of the time, mostly in agreement.

And then, there's that same body in sleep. And that's where all the weird shit that happens in waking life, that happens here and there, more to some than others—well, that's where it all breaks loose. Sort of like a gloves-off, nobody's-fooling-nobody-anymore kind of situation. Now if you can rustle me up an answer for all of this, well, sir, I'd be most happy hear you out.

Where Do Dreams Flush To?

And I keep wondering: where they flush to, these dreams? I wake up some mornings and what it seems like is that they're there but they're leaving, where are they going, where do they go, try to write them down, where do they go? They come and they go and yet while they're happening I'm prone and still and so how is it they come and go? Do they move around? And even when I capture them in a few words on a piece of paper it's not like they're not going, it's just that I'm marking their passage, their passage through me.

I mean one could say, well, they start in my brain and end in my brain, just chemicals firing off in all directions but I don't see that, I don't agree with that, I don't think so. Maybe the chemicals are playing with something else, jacking into something else, chemistry and something else. It always seems to be when you ask those deep questions, you get a handful of answers sitting on your table—then you look around and realize, *ah, there's something else, damn it, something else.*

Start Where You Are

Now, you've always got to start where you are. Always. Well, you don't have a choice but by golly, sometimes the air around you slips inside your head and tricks you into thinking you do have a choice in the matter. But I say to you now, *no, you start where you are.* There are blooms outside this window on a tree, that's where it starts. Here it is merely February in the Pacific Northwest and there are blooms outside this window. That's where you start, that's where to start. You want to build a focus, you want to see the whole world, start there. Start with something right in front of you, maybe something beautiful, maybe something that catches your eye, that you look at and you like and think: *I like that.* Now if I'm going to build a world, I'm going to start *right there.*

There might be something else in your view, something else you can see, there may be a bill for your unpaid goods or there may be a broken device, there may be a sad letter, but no, start with that beautiful thing, and it may be beautiful in the nicest of ways and it may be beautiful in a way that only you understand, you in your heart understand, maybe deeper in your heart that's where you understand. So blooms, and then beyond or within. Now that's the question because I could tell you things.

I could say that in my mind when I'm asleep and I'm dreaming, whole worlds rise up, whole worlds rise up, whole worlds rise up. Or maybe you can reach your hand out to the world and reach another hand in, so to speak, into those dreams and what they mean if anything. But anyway, start with something beautiful before you look way out or way in. Make sure the ground under your feet is solid and lovely.

Favorite Coffeehouse Gone

So, I was with my beloved on the street, and I sat down in front of our favorite coffeehouse and she just walked away and then I looked inside and it was empty, it was gone, to the floors gone, and I looked for her, and she wasn't there around either, and I sort of panicked, you might say. And what happened was I called 911 and then, well, she reappeared and said, *well, there you are* and I called back 911 and said *it's OK, it's OK, it's alright, my favorite place is gone but she's back, that girl of mine, so I'm alright, I'm alright, you thank you, you thank you, you have a nice day.*



It Came Upon Me With No Name

It came upon me with no name and it was beautiful and I couldn't describe it but I tried. It came upon me both hard and soft, hard like a punch in your belly, when you're not expecting it, so it really lays you low, and soft like a breath in your ear, whispering something you really like in a secret language that you do not know. *Now how, you ask, could it be both hard and soft?* Good question. And the answer is I don't know, for it came upon me without a name, without expectation. No explain of what it was, how long it would stay, or where, after it went, it would go.

Quick Talking Dreaming Hustling Man

Oh, yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah? Oh yeah, oh yeah. What? What? What? Oh, yeah. Oh, OK, OK, OK. Are you sure? Are you sure? No, man, really, I was standing on a corner, standing on the corner, and I was trying to get a couple bucks and this guy come up to me and he said, listen, man, I'll tell you, I'll tell you this and uh then you'll know cuz everybody should know, no no no you gotta listen, no don't walk away, you gotta listen, yeah yeah yeah, so so so there I was and I was havin this dream and and and it was a very strange dream and then I realized man, I ain't dreamin', and I looked around and I thought wow everything sort of looks well well well, well it looks uh it looks the same but not quite the same, no no no it looks kinda different, kinda different. Can't quite say how maybe it's the color, maybe it's the sound, I don't really know but listen, listen . . . yeah yeah yeah yeah, so listen listen listen listen, I'm gonna tell you what you need to know and what you need to know is that on certain nights, when the moon is half full, god shines from your big toenail.

I Was Following the Thread

I was following the thread, following the thread, I was thinking about the thread, and what it meant, it's an old story. It's an old story about how a seeker was looking to defeat the great beast and so he had to confront him, the beast would eat flesh, sacrifices, and this great hero, this great seeker hero, was deciding he was going to defeat the beast.

The beast lived in the middle of a labyrinth and the hero's lover, who knew that others had gone in to fight the beast, said *here, here's a thread, I'll hold one end as you go in, you hold the other, and that way you won't get lost along the way because there are tricks of the mind to be encountered, not just tricks of battle.*

And the seeker hero went in to the labyrinth, deep into the labyrinth, and confronted the beast, and battled the beast, and slay the beast, and was able to come back out. Elude the mind tricks and defeat the beast and come back out and win and return.

I was thinking that the thread is an idea that you can use in other ways. You can battle with

it in other ways and so that is what I was thinking about, how you follow the thread and you look back, and the thread is where you came from, and what matters, and then you can look forward and see where you're following it to, and see if they connect, and see if you're holding on tight now. And that's what you're thinking about, you're thinking about how to do that and I think that the thread idea is a helpful one, interesting. It's a way of going at it.

Sniff the Air

Well then, well then, sniff the air, sniff the air, sniff the air, oh, it smells like November. How does November smell? I suppose that's a good question. I think it often smells cool and clear and full of a sense of passing time. That's a whole hell of a lot for a November to bear in its mere scent, but yes indeed, and when I look up on this November morning, I see colorful rings floating in a mass. It's a happy mass, a colorful mass. You may say, well, what in the world are you talking about and I would say, no man, if you can't see them with your eyes open, look with your eyes shut. Colorful rings, red blue yellow green even black orange, and they're floating. It's nice whether you see with your eyes open or shut. I don't think it matters one way or the other and if you look further, maybe shift to your left or right, you might see whirling patterns of concentric circles, a mind warp of images, and you might say, *hey man, what's going on here*, and I would say, *it's a new day at the radio ranch ha ha ha*.

It Was a House

Now sometimes it will occur that if you engage the dream space, really push your fingers deep in, well, it'll fuck with you, it'll terrify you, it'll bring you screaming awake away from your sleep. It was a room, it was a house, there were rooms, I was in a room, I was moving from room to room. There were cobwebs, they got thicker and thicker, they got much thicker than they ever should have or could have been. It made no sense, *oh it made no sense*, and there was my father, deceased a while but in this dream, of course, there he was, and he was saying, *I can't hear you, I can't hear you*. And I realized that the cobwebs were very *very* thick and I was having to claw to break through them. It was tangled. I was surrounded, like a thick net, and when I broke through, there were huge spiders waiting.

It Was 1998

It was I guess you could say an historical dream of sorts, but it was involved with time travel, which made it even more interesting. It was 1998, and the funny thing with dreams was that you don't always catch why you would know such a little detail, and yet I knew it was 1998, and there I was, and it was like my mission was to find out how did we get from there to here and here I suppose would be 2010 and there of course was 1998 and they were places

you might say, and so there I was, and oddly again the two details that came through pieces of the explanation were dotcom crash and George W. Bush, and I remember thinking in this dream time travel 1998 place that I was in that I would have to look up the dotcom crash on Wikipedia. And I've been thinking ever since how the hell did we get from then to now? I've been thinking that, how did we get from then to now?

Two Bookstore Dreams

Now what was strange was that it happened twice in a week. That old bookstore. I hadn't worked in it for many years and, yet, here it was again. And somehow I was brought in for the day, and there I was among customers, each with a demand. Few of them would acknowledge that others had an equal demand of equal importance—each one was like a child with an empty cup that needed filling *right now*. And there was Amante and he greeted me, and he hadn't worked there in many years either so it made it funnier. It's like there we were both back in that store where we met years ago, working away, same work, bookstore work never changes.

And then the second time, same store but not physically the same and yet it was and yet I don't think it was, it didn't have the same qualities, it was the store with the same name but it's like it was in a shopping mall or something. There was an atrium outside. There was a crazy old man, long white hair and beard, scary eyes. He shouted something at me, something insulting, and, for a moment, but, no, I objected, protested, and told him so and he looked at me with crazier eyes and he said *I'm 75 years old* as if that justified any garbage coming out of his mouth, anything at all, *75 years old*. And the people from the bookstore where I did not work this time were looking on and eventually I followed them in and I explained to a man—who looked perhaps slightly like a man I might have worked for at some bookstore or other at some point or other—explained that I wasn't and that wasn't but *75 years old* was not justification, it just wasn't.

Dream of the Desert

It was the dream of the desert, where I'd lived so many days over the years, and I hadn't been there in a while, at least physically, and that was OK, but I hadn't been there in a while in my dreaming either, so that was curious, since that was just part of the deal over the years, curious. In this dream, the climactic event, the fire to destroy the old and burn the new into the world, had been cancelled, too stormy, that's what I'd been told by that one and this one but strangely my concerns were otherwise.



I was walking around, with a twist, both my first love and my best one all in one, most curious. Time travel is not linear, if I could draw a moment's lesson from any of this it would be that. I was in two places at once—I had not gone from now to then or then to now—I was both and a lot in between and otherwise.

Make Friends in Dreams?

And I ask: is it possible to make friends in dreams? I mean, I think I've read about this, here and there, guides, visions, bush souls, things of that kind, but I wonder, but I think it's possible. One time, I had a swarm of friends living in some kind of suburb. I'd known them for a long time. Now you ask: *were they friends from your waking days?* and I'd say *no, pretty much not, pretty much people I've never met that I've known for a very long time and cared for very much.* What do you make of that?

I took pictures when we were all together. At one point me and one of these friends, we were diffusing a bomb or something. At another point, we were talking about going to a party on New Year's Eve and there was a deep affection, it was visceral. They weren't just people I've known in waking days with different faces, these were different people, it was warm and it was dear and I loved it.

Tall Tall Building

I was in a large building, I was climbing from level to level—each one I would arrive at, and it would prove perilous. It's like I would arrive through a doorway and I'd be on a ledge and there'd be a deep drop which is strange. It's as though each floor of the building had nothing architecturally to do with the lower one or the one above, and I continued climbing and eventually I reached the top one and I found a huge library of books, many of them strange and obscure, many of them science fiction and I said *this explains the bookstore many stories below* but I wonder why I said that.

Then came the twist, the twist was while in this building on this top floor in this large library of books I got to remembering this other series of dreams about a big building, a house, and I would walk through the living room, climb a ladder or a set of stairs into the attic and this would lead me to endless series of rooms, so I was dreaming and these dreams I was having while I was dreaming were reminding me of other dreams I've had. Now you tell me the relationship between that dreaming, the other dreaming, and waking.

I Needed to Record Somebody

I needed to record somebody, it was really important, even several dreams in or down or far, depending on how you look at dreams and their architecture. I would wake within dreams to other dreams and this same need to record somebody. I needed to get this person on the phone, I needed to set up all the equipment, I needed to get their words recorded, preserved, they were important words.

But then it fell upon me and I landed within it, it was a very tall bureau, many drawers, impossibly so, a dream bureau of course, what else?—and my little friends were in the drawers, there were many of them, I don't know why, but there were many of them, they were in the drawers, they were on the top, some slipped behind. I kept trying to gather them up. They were small, I did not want them to get lost and then the littlest one of all, the one that cackles, the one that's full of shenanigans and trouble, her arm was moving around, it rotated strangely, in fact it wouldn't stop rotating. It was disturbing, I didn't understand but I kept looking and looking—

It's A Far Western City

It's a far Western city that I'm in. It's night, cold, and I'm trying to climb a very icy street, climbing on my hands and knees, crawling really. I need to get to that apartment. Find someone. It's an apartment building that the outside is the inside, depending on where you are in it. I'm trying to call my love with the phone that's unplugged and when I plug it in I notice that it's powered by large boulders and I look in the distance at this inside outside apartment toward the horizon that I shouldn't be able to see as clearly as I do and yet I do see it and there . . . wild sheets of light climb the sky, rip and mend, rip and mend the sky, and they give way as a dark bank of clouds descends low and, between the horizon and that bank of clouds, countless colored lights bounce, they bounce up and hit the clouds and bounce down and hit the horizon, bounce up and down, thousands of them, thousands of them. Good.

I'm Hired as an Auto Mechanic

Now this is a curious one. I'm hired by an auto garage as a mechanic. My buddy encourages me to take the job, and the owner of the garage is a paternal fellow, takes care of his employees. He's a good guy. I think he has a boss too, somewhere.

And when we're at work we all wear face-masks. They render our faces almost devoid of features, but quickly I realize I don't know anything about cars and fixing them and I panic. I don't have the skills or the knowledge to do this. But everyone there, all my co-workers and my boss and my buddy, they talk me into it, they say *you can do it*, they're very emotional, very close, dear, they want me to try, so I do.

I'm in School

I'm in school, art class, and a math class. I need to take both of them and pass to graduate. But after a while I stop going to the math class, I just stop going, it just doesn't matter, it's not important. The art class, though, I have an assignment to draw what's against a wall, picture frame, refrigerator, some other things, and I draw my picture and the things on the wall, against the wall, I draw the far edge of the picture, other things take up most of my picture. And I get a low grade, until I point out I had filled the assignment, those things are in my picture, they're just at the far edge and the borders.

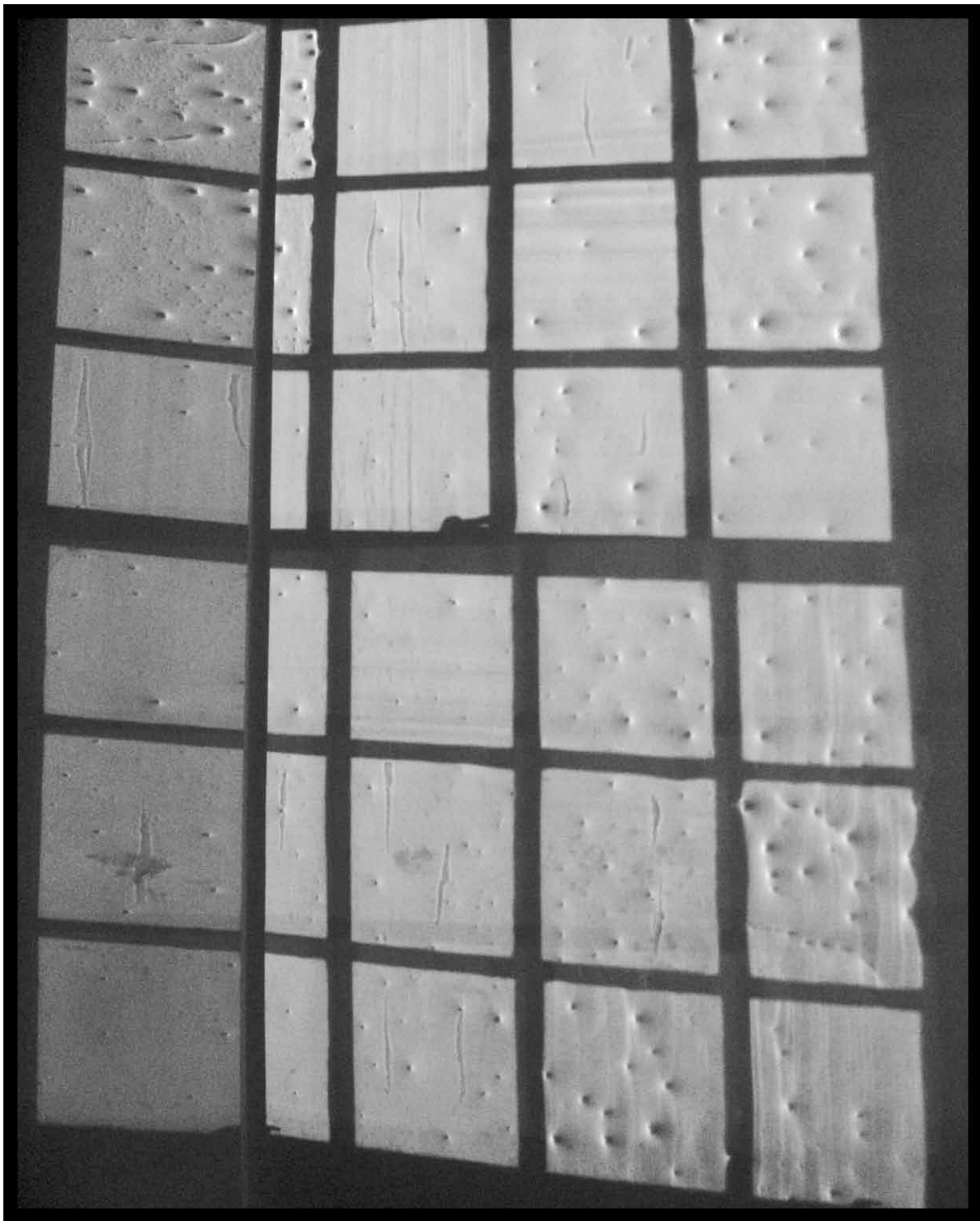
I don't like the class much, I don't like the teacher much, the teacher doesn't like me much. And I look out the window and I think a big storm's coming but I hope even the teacher survives and prospers.

I Had a Job

Well now. Well now, I say. Had a job, had a job, I say. In which I was assigned a task, first, to counsel a man who is kicking speed by starting on heroin. It was up to me to talk with him, I worked with three others whom I saw as buddies, one said bring him a present, and that job didn't last. It just did not last. I couldn't say why. Who could say why? But it did not last.

So I went to a visit a college, radio station there, it was in a warehouse-like area. And I sat talking to the ones who run it thinking *that's what I want, a room in a house devoted to radio* but alas they said *you can't DJ here, you're not a student*. Well, so much for my good plans.

Moved along, as we do. I seemed to be living in a city, going to a college, which was not really organized, no radio. At one point I was living in an apartment with an elevator, and it was very small and very crowded, and when I get out of the elevator I end up on the bus and it was crowded and I just wanted to sit till it was over.



Two Jobs Twisted into One

There was the story of a job I had and the oddness of it was that it was two jobs twisted into one. At a bookstore, always at a bookstore. And the colleague from one bookstore is working with me in the other bookstore, and he came up to me as I was trying to figure out how to ring up on the cash register a soda someone was purchasing, and he said to me instead *these books are really bad and we're trying to figure out a way to lower your pay rate*. So there's that story.

But I tend to think that there are better ones that can be told. A better one is the time I climbed the hill with that old folk singer, asking her if she was still an earth mother. She was telling me how she taught her son to play guitar because he had developed mental disabilities, and we'd nearly reached the high school up this very steep hill when I was no longer there. I was in your room, lying in your bed, looking out toward the world from where you looked out toward it many mornings before getting up, getting along your way, and I think that I don't understand even more than I thought I did.

Law Firm

Now this one went so deep I don't even know what to say but I'll try. I will try. I am working for a law firm, a new job. Early on asked about it, I liken it as a show to *LA Law* that the lawyer had not heard of. My job is ambiguous. I am uncertain, tenuous. One of the lawyers has three only somewhat friendly cats?

The lawyers tend to leave at 2:00. I experience two days there. The head lawyer has a TV interview with Senator Russ Feingold. At another point they're filming them all around a table, joshing, throwing stuff, there is a term they use I forget. I feel invalid and unsure, yet nobody is unfriendly. There is an empty office, one of the lawyers has moved from it.

It was odd because it was like I was watching a show of which I was a part and at moments we were watching shows within the show and also being filmed. Now I'm not sure, I don't know, but for the two days I resided in that law office.

LSD Expert on TV

I was on CNN, the cable TV news network. I was in the audience, and there was this expert on LSD. I can't say I knew his name or anything about him but there he was. I was sitting next to an old buddy of mine and the expert he had this long I guess you'd call it an applicator, and it was filled with LSD, and he came over and he drip-dropped it into my buddy and my eyes and he drip-dropped on our faces, splashing on our faces and on our skin, it was all wonderful and seemed strange and what could this be about being splashed on cable news TV with very nice acid with me and my buddy? He said he had no trouble—he said no one had followed

him—he said no one had followed us. He said this appearance brought in many donations that night and I remember wondering at that because I was thinking he’s talking about this as if it’s already happened. How can you talk about the present tense as though you’re in the future talking about the past? But gosh was that acid good.

Take Back Your Mind

Someone said, they said, said someone said *take back your mind* and I stumbled, hearing those words. They seemed to mean something. I mean, they seemed to mean something to me and I wondered, *where had my mind been that I needed to go there to take it back*—and I didn’t know, or maybe it hadn’t left but I had and I needed to return. Or maybe there was a siege within, a kind of paralysis in which all movement slowed, not freezing but slowed—the currents of figures the currents of waters the currents of spirit and thought, dream, dreaming, wishing and dreaming. For dreams went on, oh they went on, but wishing, not so sure about that. *Take back your mind*, whatever this means, it’s potent, it’s one of those strikes, straight and true, straight and true.

How Would You Know You Passed the Test?

After all, *how would you know if you passed the test?* that’s my question—and if you time traveled in dreams, *how would you know that too?* that’s my other question. If you were sitting there with your thick headphones on your head, mind the pencils, they grow soft during transmission from one place to another. What would that mean and if you had to kill someone to save someone else because the story just got too complicated and what about the dog, what about that dog? Not quite a dog, that’s what I say. You would pet the dog, pretty lovely fur, but the dog would never lick your hand because like I said it was not a dog, not quite, and as I also said *how would you know if you passed the test?*

All Night I Stared at Him

All night I stared at him, lying on his death bed, eyes shut, long gray beard tucked above his blanket, silent, still, and I kept coming back over and over from wherever else, like a circuit from elsewhere back to the image of this man dying in this strange place far from where he’d ruled, where he’d created, where he’d loved. Seemed a warning, warning.

There Were Birds

There were birds, there were birds, there were birds, and at first they were out the window, and they were filling my dreams so they were out the window but they were in my dreams too. They crossed over, with their singing, calling, tweeting, crossed over until eventually they formed my dreams, more and more, bigger and bigger, their singing became my dreams, my dreams became their singing more and more, and still they were out the window at their singing.

Travelling One Town to the Next

Now I suppose you could say that each one has its own groove. I'd say, well now, that's true, but I suppose that some of them groove deeper than others. There was this one where I was passing through, traveling, one town to the next, three towns in all, and so I passed through the first, passed through the second, and then I passed through the third and got to talking to someone and others too and none of them had heard of the first two. I'd been through them, of course, so I had experience of passing through them, and yet in this third town nobody knew them. Now what do you do with that? I suppose thinking about it more I would have piled him in my car, or whatever I was traveling in from the third town, and drove him on back to the second and the first, got folks meeting up, connecting because you know in Dreamland there's power and vulnerability both.

I Was Deep in the Woods

I was in some kind of woods, and at one point I was going to drink from a flower, it was a deep flower and it was full of water. But suddenly there was a great toad that leaped out of the water and then there were more toads and then they were gone.

And I turned my head slowly to watch them and found myself living in what seemed like a one-room apartment with a cement floor in a city. I leave one day, don't lock my apartment door and as I return later on a neighbor woman greets me. Lives in the building next to mine, up on the third floor. She waves. I think she's retarded. I realize I know her from other dreams. I wave back and then I walk into my apartment and all my things are gone, everything's all been cleared out, there's just two big trash bags sitting there—and I panic and I run outside to call my love in, and tell her what happened.

And I turn around again as though to a noise and find myself one of a small group of soldiers and the leader, our leader, is saying *you've got to teach us our history so that we don't forget*. And I wonder if the lesson to learn is be careful in dreams when you turn your head.



In a City on a Bus

I was in a city on a bus, I was taking a long trip, and I get off for a break, and I got into this joint, and I get a sorta hamburger at this joint. I don't have any money. That's kinda the problem. I just want a soda and a hamburger, no money and what's strange, what happens next, is that I willed some and then I had it. Now in pocket.

So I say to the old lady *can I get a soda but no ice please* and she mixes me up a soda with a spoon. I'm impressed, some kind of skill. What happens next, I'm in a fenced yard and there are two great snakes, cobras, one brown, the other really big, and they near me. I can't say for sure they were going to hurt me or I threatened them, but we were fenced in the yard, and they were snakes, and I was whatever I appeared to them to be. I grabbed them, tossed them, and what it feels like is that I'm summoning my knowledge of how to deal with the situation, how to will money for a soda, there's a familiarity with how it feels, perhaps there's more than one way, and more than one timeline into lucidity.

Poison the World

Hm, I hear a man and his wife planning to poison the world, using poison grown from seedpods and converted into honey, which when poured onto people rendering them smiling and mindless.

I watched the seeds grow in jars into these pods, large misshapen green pods. And then I'm observing them in a classroom where he administers the honey and I escape and I try to warn people. I see him come out with his wife and they need more people, families, they don't know what he's doin—and then, at the far edges of this story, whose middle I don't know, the man is defeated, and he's buried deep in the earth, many layers down, below living strata.

Sometimes the Dreams Are So Deep

Sometimes the dreams are so deep, some other kind of real, that I wake up and they're completely gone, and I don't even understand that really, how that can be, how one can be so completely immersed in, in *something*, and then it's gone, happens often, not always but often. Even what's brought back is shells from a shore, pictures, bits. Some of them are valuable, some of them are dear, but the ones where I feel like it's the entirety of everything, I feel even more all pervasive than this waking, varied and trapped and immobile, and I don't know what it means?

It Was a Hotel

It was a hotel and it was full of covert activities. And I'm in it. At one point I'm in someone's room on a cell phone and I'm told to skin the drawers, which means look for devices, and I go through them looking for devices. I don't have any luck, but my boss does, finds something, not a bug but finds something. The moment shifts or maybe I just put on the TV in the hotel room that I've broken into looking for bugs.

Anyway, I'm watching the show on Amadon, freaky kid, has a buddy with him, and a pretty sort of girlfriend, and I know that Amadon had once played an epic game of tennis ball hockey, grand it was like a planet. Now he lives in an abandoned building, friends come over, smoke some weed. It might be some sort of reality show I'm watching, maybe it's true, I don't know.

Amadon doesn't notice his sort of girlfriend's come-ons, doesn't pay attention. He was in a yearbook at his school on the basketball team page—he was the only player not to score. Amadon seems to be someone who impresses others but is lost in his own mind.

Owner of a Long Strange Warehouse

He was the owner of a long strange warehouse, at least I think he was the owner. He might have been some kind of manager. Sort of a vague overseer. He wasn't in charge, I could tell. We passed from area to area, room to room. There was no one in charge of this—there was no coherency save a roof above.

At one point we passed through a narrow room and a scrawny two-headed dog attacked me, bit me on the arm. He wasn't a two-headed dog like those you encounter in mythology, big, scary, muscled. No, he was scrawny like he hadn't eaten in awhile—he was poorly cared for, if cared for at all.

Later on, the owner was gone, didn't miss him much, he hadn't impressed me, but something had happened and I was being held with others in the gym. Being held in the gym I don't know by whom. I don't know and yet somehow I knew that there was an air duct, just had to undo a few screws and crawl on in. The whole thing seemed kind of precarious but it was a way out, and we had to get out and we had to get out soon—

I Write for a Newspaper in Dreamland

I write for a newspaper in Dreamland and it's called the *Eighth*, now figure on that one a bit. Peculiar, I'd say.

I also carry around my hekk, it's my dream-stick, it allows me to choose some dreams over

others, go into different rooms and not go into others in Dreamland. Now you figure that out. I can't figure that out. But it's interesting. The whole thing's interesting.

At one point, there was a cookie, yes indeed, there was a cookie, and there was a war and I was watching the war from the cookie's point of view. Now, wouldn't you say that's a little strange? You might say that's a little strange, you might say, *hey pal, that's a little strange, you and your dream-stick, you and your newspaper called the Eighth, you and your thoughts of wars from the cookie's point of view and what does that mean? I mean, really. What does that mean?* you're asking. I'm asking. I don't know. I only know that, day after day, more days than some, others, it deepens a little or I deepen a little with it relationally.

Complex of Rooms

It was a complex of rooms and I think a party was going on. I'm not sure, but there sure were a lot of people around. Didn't seem like roommates. I have a room, and also a bathroom, and people keep walking through the bedroom, passing through, hanging around, those kind of people, looking at my books, thinking of my things, trying to form a picture. I seem happier in the bathroom, where I have a table and chairs—perhaps that's where I work.

The bathroom is within the bedroom, it's a side door you can only get to it through the bedroom, and I like to close that door and work in the bathroom but you see, people keep coming in. I have work to do and an important phone call to make and people just keep coming. I suppose they do that.

Labyrinthine Mark on Wall

I was standing in a hallway of sorts, with my brother, and we were looking up at a wall with a labyrinthine watermark which faded from right to left, and I was thinking how I'd looked up at this wall before, I've seen that watermark, that labyrinthine watermark faded from right to left and I keep asking and wondering, *what does it mean in a dream when you remember the experience you have in a different dream, a place you've been before in two separate dreams? Are they connected? And if so, how? How are they connected? And what about those dreams where you're surrounded by people you've known for years, people you don't know in your waking years and yet here they are surrounding you and there's deep affection on all sides? What does all that mean?*

It Was a Clean Hour

It was a clean house, it was very clean and I walked through its rooms and they were all clean, I think they were empty but maybe not, maybe just bare. Maybe there wasn't much in them



It was a young man, probably early thirties, facing the viewer, holding a glass of, I think, champagne, probably just writing out something, wearing a dark top hat and a dark jacket. On the left-hand upper-corner, there was a view of the outside of the restaurant but little could be seen ... I don't remember it at all. Except, I remember there was a guy with a top hat and maybe a moustache ... He was a local writer that lunched in the cafe Tortoni everyday and always left his hat on. Manet used to eat there frequently and one day, he said: "Do you mind if I paint you?" ... It's kind of small and it's like a man, all dressed-up with a top hat, holding a pencil and drinking absinthe. I don't remember the background much because I used to just look at his eyes ... It was vibrant and the gentleman sitting there in the cafe looked at you with eyes of enjoyment and pleasure ... He had an inquisitive, questioning look in his eyes. This was not a man who was carrying major responsibility or authority. He was enjoying life but he was not just a pleasure seeker. There was also a mind at work there ... It seemed like he was looking far away. Looking out but not at you, as if in a dream ... It hung right underneath the powerful portrait of Manet's mother, but it was much more appealing and accessible. The mother, I hated her, she looked so domineering ... This dapper gentleman was so small in relation to Madame. I was more drawn to the solidity of the woman. I remember commenting to people about Madame Manet and then saying: "Oh! By the way, don't forget to glance at this gentleman." ... Except for his very white skin, the colors were mostly rustic: dark browns, dark blues and a lot of black ... I remember a predominant russet tone apart from the pale rose colored face and hands ... It's a very moving work. It reminds me of something from a hundred years later, a poster called Cafe, on the walls of my dormitory at college by an artist who used the same kind of style ... It was signed Manet, at the foot, on the left.

and why was the word “clean” the one I thought? What was it about that, those rooms and that word? Clean. And then I was in a room, down a hallway past other rooms, it was the far room of the hallway. There was a dead rat on the floor in the corner. No, I take that back. There were three of them, dead rats in the corner. What does that mean? And I looked down, shiny cockroach went scuttling by, hurrying on its way, shiny shell, see it go.

And I say to you in conclusion, or by way of assertion, perhaps both, but I say to you there is so much fucked up bullshit in this world that if you do not appreciate the lovely things, the beautiful moments, the dear fierceness, the hours that flow, you are a fool.

Small Bug on the Wall

So there I was, back deep in the old mind-cosmos-history thing, thang. And there was a small bug on the wall. It wasn't anything hardly notable but there it was. It was small, but what was weird, oh, *of course something was weird*, is that it grew and grew and it got really big and it was like it was a bug that looked like a giant pink shrimp, but it was a bug and it was terrifying because it kept getting bigger in moments, in seconds, it went from being a tiny bug to this giant pink shrimp-like thing. And my mother had a broom and she smashed it again and again, & it died, blown apart and screaming and that was something else.

Till later there was a small group of us in the field and lions appeared on the other side of the world. And we kept feeding them raw meat, they kept hanging around and we apparently had raw meat in hand for the need, and we kept feeding them, & it seemed they kept wanting more because they kept nearing us and they kept nearing us, & when we ran out of raw meat, *we were the raw meat*.

But no, no, *wait*, because I was on an airplane and I had to bring my bike to the back of the airplane to store it, but what I found in the back of the airplane was a large warehouse that was vast and full of things, and I got very lost trying to find a place to store my bike in this vast place. Then I stored it and I wanted to return to my seat on the plane but I couldn't find the way back, and I kept going on and on and I kind of ended up in a mall. I ended up on an escalator, and I was trying to return, and I looked at my airplane ticket, and it said departure 9:07, and then I looked around for a clock and it said 9:07. *Oh my goodness*.

That House By the Beach

We were living in that house by the beach. And it had been a long drive to get there. At one point, we passed through a dump advertising **hard trash**. And our car had gotten buried in the snow. I remember pushing the snow away with my hands, just to climb in the backseat window to try to get to the driver's seat to keep driving to get to the house by the beach.

And there were several people there, two just married having their honeymoon in our bedroom. Strange noises coming out of the bedroom, not the many kinds of noises of coupling either—other kinds of strange noises.

And in a different room, I was sitting on the bed and I was writing about how I had a dream about a house by the beach that had been a long drive to get to, passing through a dump advertising **hard trash** and how at the house one of the rooms was closed to us and the married couple within and their strange, strange noises.

Arriving in a New Town

Arriving in a new town, I was hardly there an hour. I made some new friends, two boys and a girl. And we were at a coffeehouse, many rooms, and there were big old computer monitors, free to use. And now it's all gone. I'm walking and I'm holding a small friend who was injured. I come to the town center, *oh, yes, class*. I forgot.

And the assignment seems to be making fireworks of some kind or another. I don't quite understand it. Back in the classroom, I ask the boy for the assignment and he gives me some papers to look at. I lose them. I go to the teacher. She's dismissive. I now have some papers but there someone else's assignment with a grade. Then I say to the boy: *You left me. I've only just moved here*. He's insulted. The girl tries to make things right but it doesn't work.

And then where am I? I'm on a bus and I guess I'm leaving that town. There's a radio or TV going and someone talking fundamental Christian talk, and there's a guy sitting up front and he's saying nasty things, and I'm saying *be tolerant*, but he won't be so I get up, walk up the aisle where he's sitting, and I grab him and I carry him to the front and I threaten to throw him out the door, and I look at the bus driver to try to intervene and say a word but he doesn't seem to care. So I put him back in his seat. Sit back in mine—find myself reading a comic strip in which I discover that he was relieved that he'd backed down. Because you always find truth in comic strips if you look hard enough.

And the bus arrives, and it's a gathering with my loved ones from many years. One's telling me to boycott the grocery store and another one's looking at me funny. Another one I haven't seen in years and I'm saying, *do a radio show like I do*. Soon I'm at a building having to make a call. I'm using a pencil to make the call. I'm trying to call about my master's thesis and tell them it won't be ready in time, and again there's someone hassling me and I say, *get away from me now*. And he does, and someone picks up on the phone, and I don't remember who to ask for.

I Think It Was What You Call a Soap Opera

I think it was what you call a soap opera. There were two agents. An older one and a younger one. And the older one was saying, *when you see you are fooled. There is truth behind maya lines about the curvature of the earth, and when you see this truth I will kill you.* And then the man's eyes glow and oceans pour from them, and that is the symbol of the show.

Wow! I am Friends with This Couple

Wow! That's all I can say. *Wow.* I am friends with this couple who buy an old church to live in. I first met them when they were in two movies. I saw them in the movies. They were characters in the movies. They were comedies. The guy was a buffoon in the comedy and I said to him, *buffoons are people who haven't found themselves yet and so accept being the butt of a joke as an easy role.* In the first film, the guy was a bartender at a party. There was a plaque in the first film that then showed up at the second. I think that was the only connection between the two.

Then she found this church. It was a big old New England-style church, and the white paint was peeling off it on all sides. It had big rooms. They showed me through it when I came to visit, room after room after room, and outside and then an old cemetery, great lawns, big gardens. The cemetery had strange stone-shaped markers. They didn't stick out of the ground like usual, they were in clusters too. And I was talking to the buffoons again, responding to someone quoting gossip saying I'd changed. I said: *Yeah, I don't squat on dick no more.*

And a priest suddenly fled from the crowd. What crowd? They were good, dear friends, I loved them both. And I loved their church and it seemed all like a good idea. They were going to fix it up and make it good. They were excited.

There She Was Again, Small

There she was again, small, and there was my brother and he was young too, and they were laying together in a nice cuddle, I'd say, and I was asking her about her baby. She said the wrong one died. I think we're speaking of dolls. She holds the dead one, tells her she loves her. She said Dad told her some souls aren't meant to complete the journey.

Now the snow, car buried in the snow, radio somewhere, the DJ saying, *I'll take you all out for beers, as long as the San Francisco flagship stays up.* And I'm clearing heaps of snow from the car, on the side of it, and the top of it, trying to get it out, get it free and someone says *noooooo.*

There Was a Situation

There was a situation, I'd say, in which I'm talking to a group of people who helped me through a bad time. I didn't see it that way till now. They gave me coffee cups as gestures of friendship. It's nice. I thank them.

And then I walk out into the night air because they're sending me on to a club. They feel I'm ready, some kind of counseling group, it's like the next stage. And I find myself in a dark club and there are ten colored lights I keep looking at and feeling like something's wrong with them.

I'm sitting next to a friendly girl and I'm talking in English to her and I'm saying, *it's a language of metaphors and displacement*. And I turn to two other guys, who I notice are about to go at it. Maybe they were looking at the lights on the wall too and equally disturbed. And I say to them, most seriously, that *a person is a house of rooms. And we go from one room to the next clearing the cobwebs, but then the rooms we're not in fill up with more and we go from one to the next*. And then to drive my point home about all of this, I say: *a chair is like a stump*. And suddenly before us there is one.

Well, eventually I have to go again. There doesn't seem to be a staying place for me very long this evening. I'm with a friend I've met along the way and we have a gun, he has a gun, we might be drunk but I don't think so but we're stumbling around, peering closely at things on the shelf and his gun goes off. And I ask: *anything interesting?* And his answer is obscure.

I'm Staying in a Guest House

Now figure it, just figure it. A TV sitcom. Hm. I'm staying in a guesthouse. Main one is fancier, much less shabby. All are located driving up very steep hills. There are parents and two blond boys and some sort of aunt. My dad is in there too. Opening sequence shows the mom and the blond boys arriving home, and a panning shot of boys getting food and doing their sequence of choreographed activities.

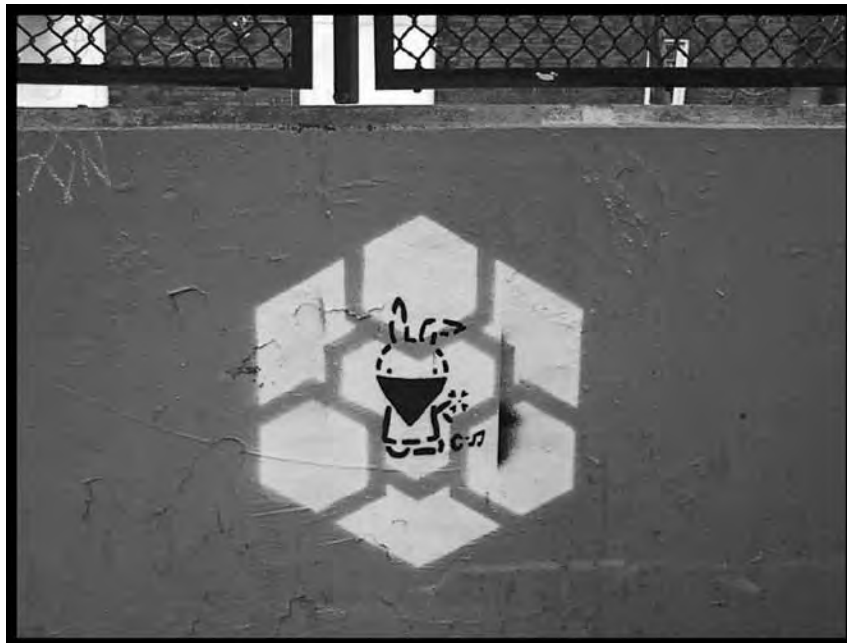
At one point I'm in my room, with another brother, telling him about a strange game I want to play involving levitation and fruit. Later, I show him my tape recorder. It snaps onto cassettes and you just hit the buttons. Somewhere in the distance Phish is playing live on the grounds, and at another point I'm bringing them pans of eggs and potatoes to the main house but then I find myself riding my bike in the rain, creaking. And finally, there's a last visual of a song, perhaps as this show ends, and the song goes: **I wash my butt and face every time I see your face.**

There is No Higher and There is No Ground We Kiss

I wrote, somewhere after, *there is no higher ground. There is no higher and there is no ground, we kiss across the abyss and you are mine once more. There is no higher and there is no ground, we kiss across the abyss and you are mine once more. There is no higher and there is no ground, we kiss across the abyss and you are mine once more. There is no higher and there is no ground, we kiss across the abyss and you are mine once more. Floating floor holds us as memories, that long ago time, far from home, all the friends, the one from Atlanta and his sports, when I held you above me and we both proposed, when I had to leave all these people and return home and I wanted you and I couldn't find you. Your sky blue eyes and the years between us, I would talk about you to everyone. It never ended, the miles, the years, and how I could not come and you could not go and above me we loved and below you we loved and it was because I was from the dream and it was because you were the dreamer. I was the dream and you were the dreamer. There is no higher and there is no ground, we kiss across the abyss and you are mine once more.*



* * * * *





Judih Haggai

in one basket
my thoughts and plans
try to appear calm

* * *

nightmares aside
such peace in simply being
breathe out, breathe in

* * *

tables and rockets
slide through the sky
morning clouds

* * *

price of bananas
design of staircase
brain mulls dilemmas

* * *

if i move
who will monitor
neighbour's cough

* * *

huge puppet
heavy on hand
mocks creator

* * *

glorious morning
birds cheer the coming
contagious delight

* * *

sealed windows
morning through slats of blinds
one triumphant fly

* * *

so close
last night ready to fly away
me and the bluebird

* * *

i don't like dwelling on loss
you
and not you
how you were so riled up
tossing your ire at every wrong
this sudden lack of you
this no more of
you
and not you
this i do not like
yet here i am
caught in a not-you chasm
a gaping breathless pit
not filled
but mockingly so
not you

* * *

rush of events
full tide emotions
melt into flat line

sudden quiet
aligns with emptiness
you're gone

* * * * *



A Clean, Well-Lighted Place

[Classic Fiction]

(From *Winner Take Nothing*, 1933)

It was late and every one had left the café except an old man who sat in the shadow the leaves of the tree made against the electric light. In the daytime the street was dusty; but at night the dew settled the dust and the old man liked to sit late because he was deaf and now at night it was quiet and he felt the difference. The two waiters inside the café knew that the old man was a little drunk, and while he was a good client they knew that if he became too drunk he would leave without paying, so they kept watch on him.

"Last week he tried to commit suicide," one waiter said.

"Why?"

"He was in despair."

"What about?"

"Nothing."

"How do you know it was nothing?"

"He has plenty of money."

They sat together at a table that was close against the wall near the door of the café and looked at the terrace where the tables were all empty except where the old man sat in the shadow of the leaves of the tree that moved slightly in the wind. A girl and a soldier went by in the street. The streetlight shone on the brass number on his collar. The girl wore no head covering and hurried beside him.

"The guard will pick him up," one waiter said.

"What does it matter if he gets what he's after?"

"He had better get off the street now. The guard will get him. They went by five minutes ago."

The old man sitting in the shadow rapped on his saucer with his glass. The younger waiter went over to him.

"What do you want?"

The old man looked at him. "Another brandy," he said.

"You'll be drunk," the waiter said. The old man looked at him. The waiter went away.

"He'll stay all night," he said to his colleague. "I'm sleepy now. I never get into bed before three o'clock. He should have killed himself last week."

The waiter took the brandy bottle and another saucer from the counter inside the café and marched out to the old man's table. He put down the saucer and poured the glass full of brandy.

"You should have killed yourself last week," he said to the deaf man. The old man motioned with his finger. "A little more," he said. The waiter poured on into the glass so that

the brandy slopped over and ran down the stem into the top saucer of the pile. "Thank you," the old man said. The waiter took the bottle back inside the café. He sat down at the table with his colleague again.

"He's drunk now," he said.

"He's drunk every night."

"What did he want to kill himself for?"

"How should I know."

"How did he do it?"

"He hung himself with a rope."

"Who cut him down?"

"His niece."

"Why did he do it?"

"For his soul."

"How much money has he got?"

"He's got plenty."

"He must be eighty years old."

"Anyway I should say he was eighty."

"I wish he would go home. I never get to bed before three o'clock. What kind of hour is that to go to bed?"

"He stays up because he likes it."

"He's lonely. I'm not lonely. I have a wife waiting in bed for me."

"He had a wife once too."

"A wife would be no good to him now."

"You can't tell. He might be better with a wife."

"His niece looks after him."

"I know. You said she cut him down."

"I wouldn't want to be that old. An old man is a nasty thing."

"Not always. This old man is clean. He drinks without spilling. Even now, drunk. Look at him."

"I don't want to look at him. I wish he would go home. He has no regard for those who must work."

The old man looked from his glass across the square, then over at the waiters.

"Another brandy," he said, pointing to his glass. The waiter who was in a hurry came over.

"Finished," he said, speaking with that omission of syntax stupid people employ when talking to drunken people or foreigners. "No more tonight. Close now."

"Another," said the old man.

"No. Finished." The waiter wiped the edge of the table with a towel and shook his head.

The old man stood up, slowly counted the saucers, took a leather coin purse from his pocket and paid for the drinks, leaving half a peseta tip.

The waiter watched him go down the street, a very old man walking unsteadily but with dignity.

"Why didn't you let him stay and drink?" the unhurried waiter asked. They were putting up the shutters. "It is not half-past two."

"I want to go home to bed."

"What is an hour?"

"More to me than to him."

"An hour is the same."

"You talk like an old man yourself. He can buy a bottle and drink at home."

"It's not the same."

"No, it is not," agreed the waiter with a wife. He did not wish to be unjust. He was only in a hurry.

"And you? You have no fear of going home before your usual hour?"

"Are you trying to insult me?"

"No, hombre, only to make a joke."

"No," the waiter who was in a hurry said, rising from putting on the metal shutters. "I have confidence. I am all confidence."

"You have youth, confidence, and a job," the older waiter said. "You have everything."

"And what do you lack?"

"Everything but work."

"You have everything I have."

"No. I have never had confidence and I'm not young."

"Come on. Stop talking nonsense and lock up."

"I am of those who like to stay late at the café," the older waiter said. "With all those who do not want to go to bed. With all those who need a light for the night."

"I want to go home and into bed."

"We are of two different kinds," the older waiter said. He was now dressed to go home. "It is not only a question of youth and confidence although those things are very beautiful. Each night I am reluctant to close up because there may be some one who needs the café."

"Hombre, there are bodegas open all night long."

"You do not understand. This is a clean and pleasant café. It is well lighted. The light is very good and also, now, there are shadows of the leaves."

"Good night," said the younger waiter.

"Good night," the other said. Turning off the electric light he continued the conversation with himself. It is the light of course but it is necessary that the place be clean and pleasant. You do not want music. Certainly you do not want music. Nor can you stand before a bar with dignity although that is all that is provided for these hours. What did he fear? It was not fear or dread. It was a nothing that he knew too well. It was all a nothing and a man was nothing too. It was only that and light was all it needed and a certain cleanness and order. Some lived in it and never felt it but he knew it all was nada y pues nada y nada y pues nada. Our nada who art in nada, nada be thy name thy kingdom nada thy will be nada in nada as it is in nada. Give us this nada our daily nada and nada us our nada as we nada our nadas and nada us not into nada but deliver us from nada; pues nada. Hail nothing full of nothing, nothing is with thee. He smiled and stood before a bar with a shining steam pressure coffee machine.

"What's yours?" asked the barman.

"Nada."

"Otro loco mas," said the barman and turned away.

"A little cup," said the waiter.

The barman poured it for him.

“The light is very bright and pleasant but the bar is unpolished,” the waiter said.

The barman looked at him but did not answer. It was too late at night for conversation.

“You want another copita?” the barman asked.

“No, thank you,” said the waiter and went out. He disliked bars and bodegas. A clean, well-lighted café was a very different thing. Now, without thinking further, he would go home to his room. He would lie in the bed and finally, with daylight, he would go to sleep. After all, he said to himself, it is probably only insomnia. Many must have it.

* * * * *



Tom Sheehan



39 Stone

You gave all of us names,
out of your presumptive fiction,
from baseball statistics,
organic names out of *Byron's*
Unpublished Poems as you called them,
from a freak spin on the basketball court
when the ball tipped in off *Tutu's* fingertips.

We come now called and bidden
to share your leaving us, daring us
to be civil in the whole matter, still
laughing up your sleeve about all this clap-
trap and silly ties and jackets on a hot night
when you know your veins are cool
and glacier-slow.

All of us you'd fool,
you said, slipping out of bounds
before we'd even know, leaving camp
when we would least notice the huge emptiness
you somehow carried for years in your back pocket
like an unexpended plug of tobacco.
You knew something we didn't.

The walls are made of speech.
your nouns and names sound like posters
having voice. More than one of us thinks
you might sit up and laugh before the night's
over, before we close down the fragile cherry-
wood lid, the ticket finally punched, you said,
a Boston & Maine conductor taking tally.

Myself, I thought you'd never go,
knowing basketball and Baudelaire,
too full of the sense of imagery at hand,
the cautions of similes and other like tastes,
too brave to call when pain tore like blowouts
through your heart. This is about those named,
39 Stone. They'll know.

* * *

Up River

This morning the sea
walks up the river
chanting on gray cubits of air,
talking sail and spar talk
the way trees worry themselves tired
and ache like old houses the wind
has a secret desire for.

Birds, blacker than some thoughts,
make mischievous noises here
all along the brush path,
through rocks, as tides turn,
the out in and the in out,
a clock at midnight's exchange,
where hands make the decision.

These birds, raucous
journeymen at nerves,
pirates at orgy's wars,
masters of chord limericks,
hosts of madcap mornings,
only allow the sea so far.
If this is a paradise, they clamor
for its absolute possession.

* * *

Ode to a Rising Sun

Out of the edge of earth,
 out of choice darkness mixed with silt
 and angry acids that form of fire,
 out of secret caverns rocking in the deep,
 out of stone moving liquefied
 which is but a sea we float on,
 out of distance,
 out of death-wracking night,
 out of fear of childhood,
 out of nightmares and terror shrieks,
 out of ignorance, out of shame of thoughts
 sitting like pebbles on the soul,
 dark black pebbles,
 out of the songs of frenzied air,
 out of the mouth of monster bird
 cast from an angry god's hands,
 freed from the moon at endless wait,
 escaping from a debtor's prison
 partly in rags and partly in pain,
 heaved upward like a mason's block
 to the next tier of gray waiting,
 on the hilltop comes the sun.

Before it, pell-mell fleeing,
 scudding down alleyways,
 across corners, stoops,
 half granite walls
 where houses used to be,
 through windows and mirrors
 and the wiliest of laces
 where night collects itself
 in a host of aromas, the shadows
 go quickly before the miracle
 hunting them down, at chase,
 at wild pursuit, leaping one wall
 to the next, one huge lunge
 across barriers, time, as if breath
 will expire too quickly again.

I listen. The sizzle starts:
 limbs grating each other. Horns
 and klaxons announcing.
 Clocks unwinding. Linens cracking
 their sheer porcelain deposits
 only odors can tell of.
 Percolators, motors, engines,
 dynamos, all huffing and puffing
 and snorting Orion away.
 Pulses and electricity
 beating at the lines, the mad energies
 of beginnings.
 Being heard, being sound,
 being echoes and static-filling air waves.
 Being noise, 3 A.M. surprises,
 movement and energy and time happening
 to inertia and all its cached parts.
 Being life belts to jet darkness.
 Being chance. Being opportunity
 all the way into something new.

Hardness gathers in the sunlight,
 artifacts of mining and distillery,
 elements from miner's foot and glazier's thumb,
 copper tubing and greened-up brass,
 old galvanized iron tongues still wagging, PVC
 like a saint among water carriers
 hardly getting dirty like Din Din Din,
 porcelain dishes and ewers
 with light cherry trimmings
 faint as postage stamps,
 buckets and ladles catching at breaths
 before sudden plunges down Earth's throat,
 bring morning's water to a thousand hands.

At Earth edge the worm
 shudders, recoils, goes gelatin.
 Earth shakes with a robin's sprint
 across a tympanic lawn, as if drummers'
 batons beat on.
 He spears the tubed, eyeless thing,
 soft telescopic escapee
 just now plowing into loam.
 The warning signs are warm.

Bridges, high arcs measuring new light,
 fields and fields of steel and concrete,
 I-bars and T-bars and girders and purlings
 and struts and bolts and nuts and plates
 by the high acre, and expansion joints
 as devious as grill work
 begin to stretch their backs,
 spread a little more to east or west
 or north and south, begin to stuff
 themselves into corners barely meant for stuffing,
 cast off their chilled auras, breathe outward
 under the new caress, the touch
 of secret places, the mouth of morning
 touching where it touches best.
 Steel stretches into sunlight.
 You can hear it flex its muscles.

Windows, like incorrigible children.
 Talk back: skyscraper faces, greenhouses.
 Across the street a woman's room leaps
 with the explosion. She could be nude
 behind that glow! A car's windshield
 becomes a moving target, throws flares back
 at the enemy. Chrome answers too,
 tracer streaks of gunships, firefights,
 strafing upward from an inversion of light
 and war and outside forces and death
 of darkness; hallway corners, dank and drear
 and wet with blood, give up the fight.
 Under stairs, attics, old coal bins webbed
 and smelling of gas under a spider's collection of glass
 and flies and moths silent for eternity,
 throw in the sponge.

Windows answer like gunshots, bomb blasts.
 Grenadiers of the dawn. Calligraphers. Signalers.
 Corps upon corps of morning glass,
 cohorts of the inner anvil, armies, legions of light,

great stationary convoys basking
 for split seconds in eternal flame.

But then, I get warm.
A bird, retreated on a dark bough,
umbrellaed under leaf canopy,
glad for morning, worm sights, a level
of breeze he can climb on
and part fingers of his wings on thermals,
hellos me all inside out.
He is crisp and clear and singular.
He is unique and melodious and real,
the torrents of his heart pounding
on the slanted shelves of air, his notes
as sure as rungs on a ladder of resonance
lifting the aria to unknown strata,
flinging it over the city's river slowly
filling up with silvering day,
cascading song and joyous light
and the energy of a breeze,
like a mountain being emptied
of all its goodness.

In the morning mountains, like sundaes
piled high with sweet textures, explode.
I catch the mouthy shrapnel they throw
into the battle dawn wages.
It is rare beauty on the fly, beams
and sunshine flares and streams and colossal
stripes of golden air coming through clouds
hanging loose as line-hung blankets.
Far mountains are the first to get the sun,
heaving upward white cones of snow
as brilliant as stars, as sure and as steady
as old men who know all answers
and give off such illumination.

But you there, at the crossroads of this day,
 looking across the inviolate stretch
 of gray light we suddenly find between us
 yet joining us, must also find the ignition as spectacle
 born in the rigors of yesterday's soul.
 You, too, know the upshot of this new coming,
 the bird, the fire, the breath as deep as stone.
 You, too, must linger where the sun warms first,
 the first warm spot of the day, the bay window
 broad as an ax sweep, a piece of porch tilted
 under a pine, a front door stoop as white as first thoughts,
 a path between corrupt oaks and sleek birches,
 a blanket where your hand falls to rest,
 the place in your eye reserved for sudden starts
 when you think all about your being is still dark
 and the nightmare is the bark of wild dogs
 crawling down the banners of your mind
 like spiders of light on the move.

When it all goes down, when the bet
 is paid off and all markers set straight,
 the sun comes with its singular entry,
 its warm shot, its two fingers of life
 into the glass, as well as every dark
 alley waiting the mercies found in light.

* * * * *





Psychedelic Comix: Interview with Artist R. Crumb

(Excerpts from Paris Review 193 | Summer 2010)

<http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/6017/the-art-of-comics-no-1-r-crumb>

INTERVIEWER

So how did you finally find publication?

CRUMB

Well, the hippie revolution happened. In 1964 I first got laid, I met my first wife, Dana, and all these proto-hippies in Cleveland. A lot of them were Jews from Cleveland Heights, Shaker Heights. They started taking LSD and urged me to try it, so Dana got some LSD from a psychiatrist; it was still legal in '65. We took it and that was totally a road-to-Damascus experience. It knocked you off your horse, taking LSD. I remember going to work that Monday, after taking LSD on Saturday, and it just seemed like a cardboard reality. It didn't seem real to me anymore. Seemed completely fake, only a paper-moon kind of world. My coworkers, they were like, *Crumb, what's the matter with you, what happened to you?* Because I was just staring at everything like I had never seen it before. And then it changed the whole direction of my artwork. Other people who had taken LSD understood right away what was going on, but the people who hadn't, my coworkers, they didn't get it.

INTERVIEWER

How did it change your artwork?

CRUMB

I had been working along in this modern adult cartoon trend, very influenced by the modern, expressionistic, arty quality of work by Jules Feiffer, Ronald Searle, Ralph Steadman. Then, on LSD, I got flung back into this cruder forties style, that suddenly became very powerful to me. It was a kind of grotesque interpretation of this forties thing, Popeye kind of stuff. I started drawing like that again. It was bizarre to people who had known my work before. Even Kurtzman said, *What the hell are you doing? You're regressing!*

INTERVIEWER

How long were you in New York?

CRUMB

I stayed there nine months and tried to make it as a commercial artist. It was too competitive for me. There were just too many really driven, ambitious career-oriented artists there. I couldn't handle it. I went back to Cleveland after nine months. I was still taking LSD and I just wasn't up for the rat race at all.

INTERVIEWER

Did you consider yourself part of the radical counterculture?

CRUMB

I wasn't that passionate about it. I agreed with it, but at the political demonstrations I would get very nervous when people started chanting in unison. I didn't like that. I usually disliked those smash-the-state kind of guys, even though I agreed politically with them. I took LSD, I said *groovy* and *far-out*, but I was kind of a detached observer.

INTERVIEWER

How did you find yourself in the middle of it?

CRUMB

In January of 1967, in a bar, I met two guys I knew who were going to San Francisco. I said, *Can I go with you?* and they said yeah. I was stuck in Cleveland at age twenty-three with a dreary job and a needy, insecure young wife. I was desperate to bust out, and here was my chance. So that night I went with them, left my wife, didn't say anything, left the job. All I had with me was a sketchbook and some pocket change. Three days later we arrive in San Francisco in this old beat-up car.

They knew some guy in North Beach and we camped out in his tiny apartment. I wandered over to Haight-Ashbury—I'd been told it was a happening place. I was sitting in this place called the Psychedelic Shop, thinking, *What am I gonna do, I've got no money, I've got nothing.* Just then this guy I knew from Cleveland wandered in and saw me and said, *Crumb! What're you doing here?* He took me to his house, and I stayed there for a few weeks. Then I felt guilty about my wife, I called her up, she came out—she had some money in the bank that we'd saved—and we got an apartment and I started doing some cards for the greeting-card company again, freelancing. Then I started doing comics for these underground papers. They would take anything, they weren't very fussy.

INTERVIEWER

They were just small papers around San Francisco?

CRUMB

I started doing these psychedelic cartoons and they caught on really fast. Other underground papers started reprinting them. There was no money in it, but it was just a thrill to see anything of mine in print. They started getting printed in all the underground papers, and then a guy from Philadelphia named Brian Zahn proposed I do a whole comic, and that's how *Zap Comix* happened. That was my dream, to make my own comic book, and I couldn't believe what this guy offered. He said, *I'll take what you make, the whole comic book, and I'll pay for it.* I said, *Wow.* I very quickly turned out two issues of *Zap Comix*. Zahn didn't come through, but a guy named Dan Donahue published the first issue.

INTERVIEWER

So you had no problems coming up with story ideas?

CRUMB

That was no problem at all. It just poured out of me in those days.

INTERVIEWER

Were you still interested in LSD?

CRUMB

I was taking LSD periodically, every couple of months. I was in a strange state of mind, influenced by these visions.

INTERVIEWER

And you were rendering it as you were seeing it?

CRUMB

I was trying to draw it in my sketchbook, and that began to coalesce into these comic strips that were stylistically based on grotesque, vulgar humor comics of the thirties and forties.

INTERVIEWER

How did you come up with ideas for major figures like Mr. Natural?

CRUMB

All of those characters came out of that crazy visionary period that I couldn't shut off. It was spontaneous, but I was so crazy, I was really out of my mind, it was like schizophrenia. It was like what produces art by crazy people in a madhouse. Anything could be an influence, anything I heard. I was in Chicago in early '66 and the radio was on, there was some tune playing, it was a black station, and this announcer said, *That was Mr. Natural*. I just started drawing Mr. Natural, this bearded guru-type character in my sketchbook, it just came out. I said, *Hey, that's kind of good*, and then played around with that some more, this faux-guru character.

INTERVIEWER

At *Zap*, you were editor in chief, and artist, and writer of dialogue.

CRUMB

And publisher, and folder, and stapler, and seller on the street. Everything.

INTERVIEWER

Did it sell well?

CRUMB

At first it didn't. We took them around to all the shops on Haight Street and they'd say, *We don't sell comic books, this is a psychedelic-poster shop, you know. A comic book?* They didn't have anything to do with comic books. But it caught on fast. *Zap Comix* caught on and then other artists started coming out of the woodwork who wanted to draw comics, hippie comics, and the whole thing blossomed into a movement—underground comics.

INTERVIEWER

How did you get to draw an album cover for Janis Joplin?

CRUMB

She liked the comics. She was around, and she came to me and asked me to do that cover. I liked Janis personally, that's why I did it. I wasn't crazy about their band. But Janis was a very talented singer.

INTERVIEWER

That must have been a big leap forward in terms of recognition, right?

CRUMB

For a while I was most well known for that, and for *Keep on Truckin'*. That was a drawing that came out of LSD trips, and the words came from a Blind Boy Fuller song from 1935. I drew it in my sketchbook and then for *Zap*. It sort of caught the popular imagination. It became a horrible popular thing.

INTERVIEWER

That is a signature of your career—no matter the ups and downs, you were always cranking it out.

CRUMB

I finally ground to a halt in 1973. My life was such a mess, such a chaos, what with the girlfriends, and the first wife, I kind of had a breakdown. I never went back to that pace again. The rest of the seventies I was very confused and lost. The inspiration of the LSD wore off. A lot of people were left adrift then, washed up on the beach.

INTERVIEWER

When did you feel you had turned a corner?

CRUMB

I never saw it as turning a corner. I just kept working and I was never sure what I was doing. I was never as cocksure again after that first LSD inspiration. Especially with fame and reputation. You become very uncertain, you have to follow your own act. I never did get that kind of spontaneous cocksureness back again. It's like going from being the observer to the observed. I had been used to being invisible when I was young. After I became well-known, it was very hard to be anonymous in the world. Of course, at first I liked all the attention. Suddenly, good-looking girls were interested in me! Wow! I couldn't believe it.

INTERVIEWER

What led you to be so open?

CRUMB

Well, maybe it was the LSD that inspired me to use comics to reveal my inner self, but along with this spiritual or positive side, there was a dark side, which I kept hidden until a certain moment. Seeing S. Clay Wilson's work was a big breakthrough, because he just drew anything that came into his head, any violent, crazy, sexual thing. I saw that and I said, *OK, anything goes, I'm just going to show it all, and reveal the dark side, everything.*

Sometimes I try to psychoanalyze those old comics, like the Big Ass Comics that I did in 1969 or '70, those sex-fantasy stories, and figure out what they're really about. There are these big, powerful female bird monsters that have predatory heads with big sharp beaks and powerful female bodies and the hero, the protagonist, is a little funny cartoon guy and he's got to deal with this whole society of these big female bird monsters. There are no males, they're all female, there's attraction and yet also fear. They're powerful and predatory. Give me twenty years on the couch with Freud and I'll figure it out. I don't know. You could even see how it's a larger metaphor, the story of the struggle of the little guy with these big, powerful, attractive, predatory creatures. A whole society of them and they are there in power, and they're organized, and they're of one mind.

* * * * *

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Joe Coleman



Saboteur J. Junior

"I will scour pretension off every innerscape
and destroy all artifice in an explosion of composition,"
vowed the saboteur—who did not hesitate—
'though knowing he himself would be buried under subtleties
when he ignited his fireball of words,
leaving behind only burning, twisted parts of speech
amid charred forms we seekers would excavate and sift
desperately looking for wounded sentences that might have survived
—phrases that waited patiently like precious stones to be mined
as if *s*apphire, *j*asper, *j*ade.

He did not imagine how hunters would marvel at his eloquence
whispering beneath stylistic debris saying,
 "i rubbed pleasure into cracks and still it crumbled,"
 (and even fainter, *"francesca. . ."*),
or how our probative ears would identify stoicism as it percolated into sadness,
then how we would dig deeper, faster, worrying.

He did not expect he could somehow emerge from that scatter-cover of paper bricks
smudged in inky soul-dust
while clutching pages of his expressive device to cover his humility.

He had not felt any need to be unearthed or particularly want to be revealed
as so peculiarly, so remarkably, so admirably authentic.

He will factor surprise into future calculations.

He will rewire
and again

Inspire.

* * *

Table of Pine

We meet in the Non-Existent Café.
 I'm being consumed by familiar hunger.
 Mannered acids of self-restraint burn inside.
 —and I hate this table.

I sit on the edge of idolatry. I sip from a glass of pure potential.
 You nibble familiarities flavored with sprinkled pleasantries.
 And we pick and we poke at conversation.

I hate this obstruction of a table.

I help myself to a lingering glance. . .
 my laser-focused obsession savors the warmth as we share
 a side-order of smiles across the barricade called a table.

I'd prefer to taste one lengthy embrace: arms entwined, shut-eyed, sated,
 metronome hearts in syncopation, holding each other like silverware.

But this stupid table is in the way—
 this tacit no-man's-land—this minefield—
 I want to leap over this hurdle—this table, I want to be food
 as it meets your mouth.

I hate the wooden separation, this goddamn divisive little table,
 —because of it's narrow-minded defiance, while craving a serving of tempting touch,
 I swallow only proximity stuck on my side of its mocking width,
 —because we are fenced off from each other
 small distance brings me close to starvation
 —because of one arbitrary table I'm forced to dine on frustrated desire.

Damn the table and damn dessert! Sweet is bitter as dinner ends.
 I pay the bill. You've had your fill. All the pie is gone. All we are is friends.
 Damp dreams can never ignite a flame and you and I are not a match.
 We leave. Then the cruel table gossips with genuine couples through the night.

* * *

Dog and Poet

Always a dog.
 Newly a poet.
 Circling in antiseptic transactions:
 creative collisions, barely touching—
 nipping;
 weekly brushes with intimacy—
 sniffing;
 listening, devoted,
 inoculated against comprehension—
 panting;
 cerebral claws dumb—
 but scratching.

Ideas are only whimpers of ecstasy.
 Chew on unfulfilled ideas
 and play dead.
 You're such a good dog.

I bite!

my teeth contaminated suggestions, I gnaw on hope.
 Beg! Lie down!
 Feral, I root at your mind until bone is revealed and surrenders,
 drooling.

We write!

Word becomes flesh. Possibilities unleashed. . .
 Up! Up! Stand!
 Roll over. Be a good poet. . .
 Smile your well-groomed smile,
 speak your fetching words,
 sit.
 Stay.
 Obey.
 Eventually we'll run rabid together
 across the seductive distance between intellect and instinct
 —howling.
 Now, give me a paw.
 Give me applause.

* * *

Tune Out. Turn Off. Drop It.

The feral dogs of the Fourth Estate strain at their chains.
 They can hardly wait
 —to slip the leash, to chase down prey,
 —to go ravening on their vicious way.
 Hot on the trail of lurid sights,
 cornering photos, exclusive rights,
 their instincts trained on the faintest scent
 of gruesome crime—tragedy—accident,
 these rabid hounds, these hungry beasts
 turn shocking sorrows to media feasts.

To claws holding press-pass and microphone
 nothing is sacred.

All Will Be Known!

Murder is meat and blood is bone.
 Not leaving the grieving family alone,
 they spit the same questions in monotone:
 “We want to know which one . . .”
 “Who, where, when?”
 and “Why?”
 “What were you feeling while watching them die?”
 Then, under the stare of their camera-eye,
 with prurient interests to satisfy,
 “Here’s some innocent bystander’s Dad and Mom . . .”
 “Results of the latest terrorist bomb . . .”
 “Deviance, death, devastation, disgrace . . .”
 “Close-ups of children with tears on their face.”
 They fight for optimal angles to shoot the senator and his prostitute
 which they will exploit and regurgitate.
 (And broadcast onto the public plate.).

Now That’s Entertainment!

We salivate
 along with the dogs of the Fourth Estate
 for payoffs, bribes and cover-ups
 to sweeten the muck in our coffee-cups.
 And we lap up their papers.
 And we tune in tomorrow for outrage, disgust and heartrending sorrow.
 The viewer and reader blithely consumes
 what “the News” vomits into our living rooms.

* * * * *

Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Labyrinthine

[a new fixtion]

Part Eight

“When did it matter the most?
When I smiled at another & *believed*.”

Well, then, a new page & thus here is the new work. Begin it not knowing but black pen in hand, familiar lined paper, the old notebook holding this behemoth, all fine, writing at a familiar joint, a coffeehouse deli of sorts, brightly lit & casual, & it's even a high Saturday evening like so often before—

So the odds favor inspiration—
Even the rock music on my headphones—
And the musewife nearby—
to complement my fixtional Rebecca—
& whatever Maya is to me—

So it's not a maybe, it's a what,
what words rush new my heart
& mind, what words—

O come on—do it—tell that story—

You were come new, & I had my gift ready for you, *oh yes* this time I would not be too early or late. A mind can convince itself of such things, that it was all bad timing & poorly selected words—

I tend to think too many & too often—

But I chased again, there was something & something else, I chased, that smile, something. It was only a dream, that smile, you were come new, & I had my gift for you. Something I kept. I keep.

Give it some more flesh. See, look, you in a skirt, a nice blouse, which one? There were a few of you, that's what makes this funny, I feel like bunching you together & get everyone shaking hands finally.

“What year did you break his heart?”

"I was 1990."

"Oh, 1985, I'd say."

"I guess I was 2002."

"Yes, that's interesting, how do you date a broken heart? When you start to break it or stop returning all calls & contact?"

"That was just mercy."

"Of course. Start to get over me."

"But not too much."

"No. But mostly."

"Yes. So I could move on with a clean conscience."

"Yes."

"Yes."

What a funny story! Now that you're all here I wonder what to do with you. Orgy? Murder? So many possibilities.

"Forgiveness?"

"Hm?"

"You could just forgive us."

"What would that accomplish?"

"Well, it might help you to feel more at ease with your heart."

"Is that what I want?"

"You loved each one of us very sincerely. For a little while each of us brightened your heart & your days. There were good moments. These are more important than the bad ones."

"Are they?"

"They should be. It's a way to integrate, accept, love in a better way."

"I guess so."

"Your gift was your Art. You shared it with each of us, & you kept it when we parted. But the world changed for all of that."

"OK."

"So if you want to write in places in your heart untapped, look back, from this far, remember, & appreciate, love new. Love like a blessing tossed into the night for each of us, your long ago & longer ago loves, bless each & every one of us as a way toward your every new Art—"

"I'll have to find the good music in this"

Nods.

"What I remember most is my desire, not any of you apart from this. The desire, the eventual rejection. Every fact, facet, detail, is attached to this timeline. It is not rational, nor a complete or fair account of any of you as a person."

"No."

"Each of you was a wanted girl & for a time returned this want. And then didn't."

"Or stopped saying."

"Same thing."

"No. But yes."

I shake my head. Too many lines, this is not the world no matter how it felt, how long &

deeply.

There are other stories & I'll tell them—

"Don't forget us. Tonight. These pages. Promise."

"Promise what?"

"Promise the residua each of us bears in you. Let it be OK. Let it shine as well as sadden."

"I don't know."

"It can. It's how you do this. Culmination. Muse denying no source."

"I'll try. I will."

"And the Red Bag? What to do with all this?"

"The Red Bag goes as far as you take it."

"It's another way to dreams."

"Maybe other kinds of dreams."

"I don't know."

"What then?"

"Someone closed the lanes."

"Lanes?"

"To Dreamland. I don't know how that is possible. People still dream—"

"But?"

"The commerce of it. There's interference."

"?"

"Dreamland is ridiculed, blocked by ridicule. Belittlement."

"And the Red Bag?"

"It is where one would not seek to find it. A place long of death & decay."

"And yet."

"*And yet.*"

If not to write of all, the Red Bag at least urges one to admit of all. The best hours, like this one, & the many lesser. If one is to by way of Red Bag develop some other kind of relation with Dreamland, admitting of all is necessary.

"But eventually story will come."

"Of course."

"Like now."

He writes, a hundred or many more years ago, "*These glaring beasts of night, still, the softest touch in my breathing, then the hustles with new sun.*"

Pauses. The room is cold, is not well-sealed, is small. Yet his one window miraculously looks out to a brightly-lit city, & beyond to woods, impossible woods, & he can sniff in the weakest hours just a bit of salt water. He may not have forever here, but he has now, he writes,

"I'll start explaining myself by simple numbers when any of you can nod & smile, & finally account



for the remain."

He stops again. Sometimes the words come in legions, sometimes in small potent packs. He has learned this much, trusts it enough.

The room contains his bed, a great ville of a bed, his prize, where his work commences, & his desk, a simple table with a comfortable chair, simple but to his need. They contrast yet complement. The bed, legions; the desk, packs. The window reminds him of the world, & insists his humble path.

The new dream. He reviews the scrawl of notes, writ when half-awake, trying to keep its bones & enough flesh, & whatever else. Now to the task.

New page. Old notebook. Everything ordered to lure fertility, induce growth. "*Winter dawn in that strange youth.*" Pauses, thinks. Studies scrawl. "*Tossing newspapers at locked suburban doors, talking myself through inner worlds, finer than the day to come.*"

Tries to remember the dream body he inhabited, he was young, gaunt but essentially healthy. This task was important to him. Thinks. "*A pretty girl, a pen in hand, even the simple gesture of a smile & a handshake.*" Pauses. Nods. Yes, he's got it now. He wears the dream body again, now walking.

Writes more confidently, his handwriting bolder, stranger, fluid. "*Big simple worlds I did not yet know how to conjure. I'd come home, fingers & limbs numb, & the sharp yips of the thaw.*"

One more pause, a breath, who would you have observed writing at this point, the man or the dream-soul whose body he now re-inhabited?

"Thaws hurt, then & now, & bigger inner worlds still call to be created."

Ah yes. Good. They part again, but this dream-soul does not dissipate. He lives on, in these words, but more. So much more.

The writer nods, smiles, shakes his shaggy head, years still from the bald pate it will be, one of the many costs he will accept to do this work, & well.

Another day, another year, another season. Later, older. A girl sleeps in his bed, she'd been hired but now stays more often, & where there was sex for money something else is happening of late. It wasn't intended & yet. She was young, had not been with many men. None of this would have mattered, however, if she hadn't asked what he was writing, hadn't stayed overnight, not usual for whores, hadn't wakened, & seen him at his table, & asked. If he hadn't answered.

"Dreams?"

"Yes. Dreams."

"Like a diary?"

"Not so much."

"What then?"

The light shined her face softly. He liked her taste, her scent, more than he expected. Was fairly poor but would have paid double if she'd said. She was clean, she was light. It was troubling.

He talks, really talks, shouldn't, does.

"I discovered something strange awhile ago. If I select my dreams well, write them down well, in initial notes, then at length, I seem to have the power to take on the flesh of the figures from these dreams, give them a life independent of their dreamers. They are free to exist in Dreamland thereon."

She is silent. These words should be strange to her, if not ridiculous, & yet they aren't. She nods, & reaches for a cigarette.

"I dislike when you smoke."

"Just one."

He nods. Continues.

"For a long time I would select just one figure from a dream. Whoever I seemed to be in it. I would write until I was that person, sitting here, writing. But then something happened & I realized I could do more. I could dream differently. Shift from figure to figure in a dream, & capture more of them in my notes, & release more of them."

She smokes, listens.

"It's more tiring this way. I am younger than I look. But it's what I do."

She gestures to his newest pages, from that morning, while she slept.

"Read to me from them."

He hesitates. He never has. She nods. Her eyes are a dark lively delicious blue. He is not her customer. She will not leave. Too much is happening in this moment. Panicked, he reads when he would not have.

"In his cage, he remembers. The scent of unknown flowers, chemicals really, the wind from the window he'd quickly come through." His voice is shaky, but he continues. *"Two quick breaths, then his, the gentleness he crushed, but then let go a little. Maybe it was God's urge, he ignored the chemicals."*

Doesn't look up. The room is completely silent. He reads on. *"In her room she smokes. There is music on the radio, too soft for lyrics, as she likes. She stares through the ceiling, always has since, even more now. She's learned new ways to laugh too, less personal, more forgiving, for the many hands striking empty air, & again, & again, & somehow yet call this a life."*

Still silence. "How did you know?"

"Know what?"

"That's my dream. I had it last night. *How did you know?*"

He doesn't move. Doesn't breathe.

"He scared me at first, coming through my window, hushing me. We just lay together for a long time, he smelled like earth & sweat, I was in panties & a t-shirt.

"They'd said he was gay & I knew they meant he preferred guys & this bothered me. Was I jealous? No, but now I knew why. It wasn't true. It was his ruse. Depending if I was game. I guess he decided I was.

"I resisted a little at first, isn't that what you're supposed to do? But he was too gentle & commanding both.

"The books aren't enough," he crooned in my ear as his hands gently heated me up. No to this became yes to this became fuck yes to this, & he taught me to ride, to open myself up, more than naked, more than wanting even, he kept giving me back my desires, kept making me see them, I was long past the fucking of it, he'd had me hours ago I think but no, this, some answers. Something.

"Deception. Denial. Deferment." I moaned quietly, almost happily. My big gay lover.

"Listen" he compelled & I did & I am, I am listening now

"Deception. Denial. Deferment. You can live your whole life & never get beyond these. These are the invisible bars."

I listened as he tongued my clit & made me cum over & over, & he kept bringing me back to it, to these words, I wished my body was more generous but he didn't exist in that way, to make me or any girl feel judged, or lesser, he felt very near to me, held it, held it long in his hands & his heart & he knew, he knew—

And here's what I tell to you, the work I do is from that night, from what he gave me, when I sing, when I play, it's because of that night & how as I lay beneath him at dawn, feeling him slide gracefully in & out, eyes shut, smiling, he said, "open your eyes. Look up!"

The ceiling was gone. And I saw them. The beautiful ships. So many of them up there. So many.

Now she is back. Now I understand. This was never random. She chose to come here. I hired tits & ass, as I did whenever I could, sometimes instead of food. I received ligaments & light.

"What now? You knew."

"You told me."

"You knew."

She nods.

"What now?"

"He was my teacher. He gifted me to know. To disbelieve, to sing discontent. To resist."

"But—"

"He said—he knew—there was more. It's why he showed me the ships. He came so hard inside me my mind exploded white light. I was gone.

"I woke up. He was gone.

The ceiling was a ceiling.

I was just a girl & most
were bent on chuting me
to acceptable breeding while a

few on the way just wanted
their fun.”

“What did you do?”

“I did what any good sheep would do. I had fun. I learned.”

“So you forgot. Moved on.”

“No. Not at all. I just needed time.”

“It didn’t go well.”

“At first, yes. But the books didn’t get better at what I needed. The boys kept coming. The men.”

“They saw nothing.”

“They saw practiced guts. I had a reputation. It didn’t help me.”

“At first. Or for awhile. But then.”

She smiles & I cringe. She is still young, but *oh the power*.

“I came this way because I was let alone. I chose who, & charged a great deal. I had no allies, which was dangerous, but the men themselves protected me, they began to want me more.”

“Like me.”

“Yes. But I didn’t return it. I gave them satisfaction, relief, pleasure, but a few wanted more.”

“And you?”

“I wanted answers. What had I seen that night? *What had he let me see?* I was still cumming that moment. I was still crying & exploding for it.”

“And me?”

“An accident. I guess. One of the other girls. An old friend. We ran into each other. She told me about you.”

“What did she say?”

“She said you were poor, smart, good looking, & she didn’t know why you needed a whore.”

“What else?”

“She said I should be with you. ‘That would be something,’ she said.”

“What else?”

“Nothing. Told me your route, what you liked in girls.”

“And the rest?”

She smiles. Sincere. Simple.

“You are what I wanted. I’m sure of it now.”

“But I write about dreams, not spaceships. Even beautiful ones.”

“It doesn’t matter.”

“What does?”

“They come from Emandia. That’s their home.”

“The ships?”

“I think so.”

“So we come from there? They brought us here?”

“No.”

“What?”

“This is like a farm. A laboratory.”

“The earth?”

“Yes.”

“We’re crops?”

"More like. I don't know. Farm animals."

"Why? What for?"

"They wanted to understand their own origins. They didn't have better answers than we do. So they thought to device a planet."

"This sounds like a book I read."

"It should. Or a number of them. From many places & times. We get close to seeing things for what they are. The bars. The watchers. Then something happens & we collapse into our blood & obsessions again."

"And what to do with this knowledge anyway?"

She laughs. "I found for a long time that fucking helped. It wasn't like with him but I selected my company well."

"Until."

"No until. I knew it wouldn't last. I was going to meet you."

"Or?"

"There was no or."

"There's always an or."

She shakes her head. Won't say.

"What now?"

She coaxes him back to his, now their, bed. "We dream. Just like last night. We dream."

At first nothing unusual. A preacher, I am on a sidewalk & my book is in my hand, in my head, I am glowing words of truth, practically staggering as I cry, "Only suffering defines this human dimension! Suffering & submission & the relief of letting another direct your path hereon!"

*Oh & it does feel good, the night is roaring close & there are many eyes & I suck close to a few, I need & succor close, I suckle close, those doubts, those doubts of your way, oh yes, look at me, look at me, say it with me, **I am nobody, I know nothing** oh say it with me, away the hungry gazes at the skirts, the benign wonderings at the trees, no, away, close upon me, brother, very close upon me, close upon me, soft, soft, & listen as I read you words, they are true, they may hurt, but they are true"*

& then you come up. I am thrown, what. Those near me, listening, look at you, at us, they wait, it's what they're trained to do, let the powers tangle & something subside.

I follow you. Every soft rippling muscle, every easy moving limb, I follow you & I am the preacher & I am me, & we are in an alley & I am all over you biting your cheek, your shoulders, your breast, you pull me in you & I know you & yet also I have not been with a woman like this & I cry in fear & panic & rage & lust,—cry your power to control me, to raise me, I cry, & I find us continuing along, more calmly, eventually I'm OK, now it's springtime, mercy's cool air you walk with me, we walk together now, you understand better, we do,

"What?"

"Keep him. Bring him along."

"Write him."

"No. *Keep him*. We can use him. I like his taste. I like his scent."

We follow the homeless man. She wants to. The preacher is willing, is still so fucking enthralled



with her he'd say yes to anything. Accepts he is from a dream. It does not seem to bother him.

"Your pussy is his fucking narcotic."

"He's sweet."

"How does this get us to the beautiful ships?"

"There are many paths but most of them are blocked."

"How?"

She doesn't want to tell me.

Sees me anger.

"OK. OK. It's the Red Bag."

"Red Bag?"

"Yes."

"What's that?"

"How we get there."

I nod. Like nodding means anything. We follow the homeless man into the transit station, down the escalator, to his perch where he holds a sign **SEEKING HUMAN KINDNESS** & stares, we follow him until we are with him.

"The Red Bag."

He shakes his head.

"Tell us."

"Who?"

"Tell."

He begins to hurt a little, she is impatient. Doesn't hold out long.

"I'll show you. But that's all."

We follow. A restroom. Not too unkempt. A closet. There it is.

"Listen. I don't know you. You shouldn't."

"Go."

"Um"

"Go! & don't ever come back here" she flees him with her command, we lock the restroom, kneel close.

"This is it?"

"One of them."

"What do we do?"

That's when my girl returns to me. "We close our eyes, lover. Close our eyes, imagine we're inside. And there we will be."

It was that easy.

i.

There surely are always fragments, start with these

"Was it simply to snatch your glance from every man & tree, from lilac winds & blue dusks, ruffle you enough to notice me & keep noticing me, that I moved toward the tangled gate, *notice me, notice me*, I'll kill the Beast that consumes the dancers, kill him & bring him steaming back to you.

“Yes I will pass into the tangled gate,
 holding the black thread,
 thread to the Beast, path only
 to the Beast”

Or:

“It was the rock band that night, Ariadne’s Thread, & I nearly strangled my own breath, & awoke. I am still here, within the tangled gate. A whole world, here, not a simple maze with a beast, ahh. This is why the dancer-sacrifices never escape, have never returned But—

“Ariadne’s Thread? I looked at my costume, these were my clothes, styles I knew, how had I?”

Or:

“I led them to the tangled gate, as my father directed, these pretty boys & girls to be eaten by the Beast, but I knew what this meant.

“The Labyrinth was a portal, the Beast really a maw in the earth, where the dancers were consumed to emerge elsewhere, another time.”

Keep going:

“The Labyrinth is a portal, like the Red Bag. Um. It has existed in different forms in various times & places.”

“They breach time & space.

“They are guarded each one.

“There is a weakness.

“A guardian abandoned.

“She has a broken heart.

“The way through the Labyrinth is only partly physical. One drinks the elixir, one continues along in dreams.

“One Woods. Portals defying time & space. Co-location.”

Wait. Stop. Start again.

It’s that fucking dream of the white squirrel. I dream about him or I am him, I don’t know. But a fucking white squirrel. Do they really exist? Probably.

I’m a white squirrel dressed up as a fireman to win a role. Huh?

Yah. Again & again.

“Wake up.”

“Wake the fuck up.”

“Cmon, Jet. Wake up, big boy. Time to greet the day.”

Man, do I not want to greet the fucking day. As squirrel or man. Every part of me hurts. And I can make it stop. That's the shit of it. Any of these rotten fucking days I can wake up, roll out of bed, & make it stop.

I just gotta give up.

And I so don't want to.

So that's what she's after me about. Not a bad girl. I've had better & worse. That's how it is. It's like you even out in the end. Who stays with you. I think even odds is pretty good really.

But I'm too stupid to take them.

I get told all sorts of stupid shit about my options for staying in the Game other ways. I can teach others, share what I know from the inside even when I'm not able enough to play it myself anymore.

But I know I am able. I just need a decent team. Protect me when I'm putting myself out there—

My new team isn't very promising.

I'm trying to believe but—

The pain I feel pulls me one way—

The only two people I ever loved the other—

My father sold fire. My brother blazed. I worked the space between them. We balanced each other. It held together a long time. Now they're gone, long gone, & my best days are back there & still I'm getting up & doing this. I put on my equipment, I head out to the field. I try to make the plays. Some I make.

I need the right team—

“Get up, Jet. There's work to be done.”

I need a new everything

ii.

The radio station that's been on all night gets strange toward dawn, as the rest of the night does—

A song that begins in mild acoustic pleasure drives through a full horn blowout before every guitar in the world, it seems, brings it on back to the melodic quiet & gone.

And the words sung with wonder, almost humor:

*When the glaring lights have left
 When the music has slowed to smoke
 When there is sniff of good blood & then no more
 When touch brittles maybe to break
 When best taste is old & cold, hurts*

*The red bag, doorway, back to dreams
 The red bag, the path, come
 The red bag, come, trust, come here.*

He'd heard it before, didn't like it at first but the tune had grown on him over time, he supposed—

The hotel room was wonderfully dark, & the torso next to his sleeping & still. He tried to remember but then gave up. As the day moved along, it would come. He would know again.

He sniffed. Sweat, & something fuzzily resembling flowers. Breath deep, slow, steady. Why couldn't he remember? Was it getting worse? Had it always been like this? Was this someone important to him? Not a whore. Unless he'd paid one to sleep over. Would he do that? How did he know, more than anything else right now, that his memories would return later? Was it like this every fucking morning?

If she was dear to him, she would give him comfort & reassurance, would stay by him until he was good again. If not, well, she'd dress and go.

He noticed how still he was keeping, so as not to wake her. Then again, the radio was on, softly, & that hadn't waked her. And that song. It had been familiar.

He quietly felt below to see if he was naked. He was. But wait. Weird. A long scab on his side, fresh, ridged, like . . . a letter. Letters? His finger lightly traced them over & over. He'd carved a fucking message in his skin!

G . . . E . . . T . . . O . . . U . . . T . . . N . . . O . . . W

Get out now.

A flinch & she was on top of him.

Could have tossed two of her off but for the gun pointed at his temple.

"This is where you trust me."

"This is where I have no choice."

"You feel that fucking scab almost every morning."

"So you keep the gun close & wake up before I do?"

"Pretty much. Yes."

"Would you shoot?"

"Yes. I don't want to. But yes."

"And I have no reason not to believe you."

“No.”

“So how do we do this?”

“You put your hands flat under you, spread your legs slowly, & I climb off. Then we talk.”

“Sounds kinky.”

“You say that every time.”

“I believe you. All of it. Here’s me putting my hands below me. Legs spreading.”

She agilely half-tumbles, half-leaps off him & he’s sure her gun never stops pointing at his temple.

The song on the radio was a signal, got him up & through his motions, clicked something in his brain to start remembering.

He was not a captive but injured. He’d been a prisoner until recently, until she & others broke him out. She didn’t know about the scab until that first morning he’d tried to run.

“Who held me?”

“It’s complicated.”

“Who are you?”

She laughs. “A friend.”

The room is still pretty dark but she knows about this point he’s trying to see her. Wondering if they—

“Did we—?”

“You’ll remember later.”

He nods. She puts the gun away, the morning’s drama is over.

As we leave the hotel room, by a service elevator, as we move from vehicle to vehicle, an element of randomness in it we ourselves cannot fully know, making our way out of the city, but in no coherent manner, I begin to recognize you—

it’s your smell, though you’ve learned not to wear scent—you’d stop sweating familiarly if you could, only half a laugh—

but I know you—I know you in the way a man knows a woman who he’s possessed & who’s *possessed him*—your hands are light, betray your harsh quiet words, your almost constant low-level fear, they fly about weightless, gesture, point, dance, never still, flutter, flutter, & you see me see & flush badly—

“My hands. Every fucking day.”

I smile.

“Just once . . . just fucking once . . . my tits. A good look at my ass.” I look & look. Nod. Lick my lips. She smiles but it’s some wrong kind of smile. We possessed each other long & deep, but it’s no more, maybe not even recent over. I’m more blood-kin-loved by her now than love or want. She sees my eyes knowing more & more.

“I’m sorry. This is the best the doctors can do. We get you back fully for a few hours. Then you



fade & sleep.”

“And start again?”

“Why?”

“What do you mean?”

“Why go to this length? Why you? You don’t love me anymore. What kind of fucked-up obligation is this?”

She doesn’t flinch. “You’ve been there. On those ships up there. They fried half your brains trying to talk to you. Just talk.”

“Why you?”

She turns away. “You stopped loving me. You’ll get there in an hour or so. Right now you’re feeling what we used to have. It will cool. You’ll see.”

We’re in the back of a van, a couple of guys with guns who I can see are really looking away. They were warned about this but it’s still fascinating. Watch a man fall in & out of love in a couple of hours. Should be a line for tickets.

I pull her close to me. She resists, & doesn’t, like this has happened before.

“I don’t want it to cool.”

She nods. Lets my hand roam her lightly. Touching her face. Her look is stony but a sort of implosion to it too. Waiting. I try to think. Reason. What haven’t I tried? If I’m so fucking valuable, why isn’t there another way?

She rests against me finally. Lightly, finally. I make two fists. I let them loose.

When we arrive to where we’re coming, it’s a place of maps & machines. We’re not enemies with them up there, but they move with such immense power in their ships & in their beings, that they destroy us like feet walking on a lawn.

For awhile I pay attention as I am briefed in the basics, like I am every single day, it seems. I have been on their ships more than once, but the last time I tried peaceful contact, almost as a desperate move. This is what damaged me.

“And now we are trying to extract from you what they said”

I nod.

“That’s why she’s here. She brings you back sooner than any drug or method we have.” They seem apologetic.

I suspect there’s something more.

What am I missing?

She looks at me so fiercely I feel like I am going to drop. She takes my hand & the rest of them look away. She leads me to a room & shuts the door.

I look around. It’s familiar.

“Why?”

“It’s the last time we were together. In a room that looked like this.”

She dims the lights, leads me to the bed, never loses my eyes for a moment, undresses with a gravity I can hardly breathe.

Her body is slender & moves into my grasp strongly & submissively.

There is a picture on the wall opposite our bed & even in the dim I am drawn to it, a flash contained it her mouth on mine her mouth gnawing mine no resistance no words that glint something I know her breasts soft hard things in my hands she nudges me touch taste she knows my moves knows how to steer me but we steer each other for my pinkie finger is down low on her teasing teasing wetter wetter it's an egg that glint she rolls atop me shifts her hips to slide me in & I amaze that I am ready very hard for her for whatever this is it's an egg falling off a table & I nod as I did then & her hips claw me in deeper she moans sadly she cries as I thrust in harder & harder & harder it's a picture on the wall of the hotel room where I came to say goodbye to her—

*We cum together, it just happens, we cry & cum into each other, cry hard & it floods me, everything, all those disappointments over years, cry, cum, oh fuck shit fuck **fuck shit fuck shit***

Nothing. All of it.

We lay in grasp a moment then I nod. She lets me go reluctantly. This isn't a replay for her. She does this new with me every night. To help the cause? Save the planet. No. She dresses with her back to me, silently.

Not even close.

We come out of the room, the fake motel room set, & get to work.

I don't talk to her again for several hours. But I understand why as the night's incomplete work winds up, we are driven to some hotel room in the city, random changes of car, random changes of driver, & why we check in as husband & wife, down to the rings, & why we silently undress & get under our covers together & she crawls into my grasp & I begin to fade knowing it will all begin again tomorrow & my heart quaking under this knows the secret word to the ones plainly awed in my skin. Her. *Get her out now.*

iii.

I fell asleep, sad again, & looking far into the darkness I could see the cankerous shaft in me, its veins twisting maybe deep as blood, o yes, could see how it bore through, then, the most lost, secret sweets of then, barely a seed with limbs, unaware my unspent life to now, taking in all it could, a blind, unhappy, frenzied mortal feeding, consuming & yet not all, for there was an opposite, what?

One of them, several of them, in Global Wall's bed, have they been in one bed for long now? Every night? They take turns with him, sometimes all at once, yet there is a politics to their play, a campaign

"Emandia is real. Emandia is real."

Another shaft, of music, culminating music, a shaft of forest breezes, ocean waves, leaves, curling inward, open hands, even closed ones, the coming harmonies of mutual get & gain, putting on another's dream to understand, the pink & purple & green colors of want, & I wished, wish, seeing both plain now, to near the one & dismiss the other.

They keep me elevated all the time. Sing to me. Tell me the oldest corniest jokes in their sexy girlish voices. They wear loose thing to obscure the looks of others, & tight things close for me. They smile sexy. They smile innocent. They smile fun. They love me like this is all.

Emandia is real. *Emandia is real.*

They think they are telling me something new, or convincing me of something but I know about Emandia. The ships overhead, all that. And there was a time, back in the White Woods, in the middle of all that—

they sent me a communication, shaped like a girl of course.

Long blonde hair, very light blue eyes but with a dark sparkle in them. Wore many ragged bracelets on her arm.

I noticed her on the cameras, one night when I was monitoring activities. She didn't act like most of them, looking for a place in things, allies, information, any kind of escape. She sat on her bed in the dormitory & seemed full of ease, not coming or going. Aware, but not interested.

I accessed her file, there had been no struggle taking her, none. Like waiting? Not like some over the years, nihilist, suicidal, bored.

A plant? I wanted to know, & then break her. It would be a challenge.

She was still in her street clothes. Short jeans shorts, a rag of a crimson top, black bra exposed as part of it. Long blonde hair, lovely. A plant?

Brought to my second chamber, not the main one.

The soft vague lighting, the opiated air. No restraints. She walked in.

Pale pink painted nails. More bracelets on her ankles.

Stood. Saw the bed. Waited.

"Do you know why you're here?"

She nodded.

"Tell."

"It's not hard to figure."

Harsher: "tell"

"You want me"

"Is that all?"

"You get what you want"

"Are you afraid?"

She smiled, not trying to figure where I was.

"Tell."

"I have a message."

I was silent.

She sat on the edge of the bed. Pulled off her blouse. Shed her jeans. Black thong too. Patted the bed beside her.

"Tell"

Patted bed again.

I walked into the room after adjusting the air. Smart, I could tell she was breathing shallow, but she had to breathe. I had pills to offset the effects. Adjusted the lights too. She was

wavering a bit. Well-trained by someone but still a girl.

“Stand.”

5-2, maybe 5-3. Perfect torso. Tried to focus her eyes, her mind. Wavered.

I sat on the bed, patted my lap.

“Face me”

She straddled my lap. “Lean your head on my shoulder.” She did. Quickened heartbeat the only clue.

“The message.”

She started, the room was floating.

“The message. Whisper it softly in my ear now.”

She kept starting, adjusting, scared, waiting. Like someone moving her inner switches.

So I moved her long blonde hair away from her ear & whispered “They chose you for your lovely body & face”

She was wavering more & I needed her to stay steady. I very quietly taught her to breathe only through her nose, short sharp breaths, & she calmed. She was scared but my kindness held her steady.

I whispered her again. “They figured I’d fuck you & dump you somewhere. Once you’d delivered your message.”

She was half-clinging to me now. “The first will happen, not the second.” She gasped softly. “Did they know you’re a virgin?” She shakes her head into my shoulder. “You fooled them.” Nod. “Why?” “They said they would stop bothering me in dreams.” “Bad ones?” Nod. “Really bad?” “Some come true.” “How?” “Sometimes I see things that happen later. Sometimes I do things.” “They said if you brought me their message, it would stop?” She nods. “They trained you?” She nods. “And is this what you expected?” Shakes her head. “You thought you could handle it” Says nothing.

“Stand up”

She stands.

“Turn. Slowly.”

She does. Still a little wavering. Waits.

“OK, sit.” She resumes my lap almost eagerly.

I smell her skin closely. It’s clean. It’s the fresh people don’t have later.

“The message.”

She whispers me. “Emandia.” Her embrace is very close. She’s turned. “The dreams are far here, aren’t they?” Nods into my shoulder. “You want to stay?” Nods, slowly. “And?” Nods. My fingers slide up & unhook her bra. She is scared but free of the burden. So light feeling. She kisses me softly, closed mouthed, I take her fingers in mine & we slide her bra off together. We tangle in the bed & I slide a secret lever so the air heavies in another way, the light shifts, she won’t let me untangle, moans quietly for me, pulls me closer & closer, we lay side by side & her thong is off & her legs among mine & I am inside her in a rapid thrust so the pain, worst of it, is past quickly & then the thrusts are slow & slower, she learns to ride & rides, learn to ride & rides, I steer her to a very slow first orgasm then quick, & another & now for her ass, & in her mouth, & I make her laugh & when she wakes up later she has only her tender cunt to credit for the reality of me in this world as she looks around her bedroom & doesn’t feel scared, not at all, I’d taken care of it *so you see I got my news of Emandia awhile ago & know how they work but I have skills they don’t reckon & these are my girls you fucking bugeyed bastards—*

iv.

The film about her later emphasized her journey, the one she took after her death, traveling north, where all comes from, but they missed some of those last days of her life, what had been on her mind that set her travels after she died, how she'd found a focus, how beautiful it was, what she became that crossed over death easily & how she ended up on that beach—

It was chance, the kind that makes one believe thereafter that the universe has purpose & order or conversely that nothing important results from knowing the cause & effect of anything—

She'd been expecting answers all her life, & what had come had been a succession of words—ones that held her closely & taught her to pray, to dress, to speak, to act one way & not another—

Later words cajoling her skin, her fingers, her lips, words that softly manipulated & she to heed or resist—

But, really, nothing. What others found in her, answers, sate, she lacked for herself. It was disappointing, all of it, to dress, to smile, to pray, to feel the body move in her, moan, cry, & no, words less convinced, words not the flaw in it, simply poorly used—

She'd come to the museum that day because, in truth, she was unpeeling one more boy & he was stubborn.

He held her hand as they looked at a photograph of a half-destructed room, broken windows, exposed earth below floorboards, a tipped piano in the corner—

Squeezed her hand as they looked at an oil painting of an egg falling off a table, balanced just so but likely to fall—

And the statue of the red bag, his breath was short as was her skirt, she expected it once more & this time to flush him out completely—

Then the room that changed things completely—

Water lilies. Violet light infused the picture, the sharp details few among the blotches,
oh

A cathedral, in watery air, there not there, a colorful thought, what?

Haystacks in dusk, raggedy fields of light, the boy was forgotten, when he reached for her hand with a word she looked unseeing through him.

Claude Monet. Was he famous? She didn't know anything about Art. She'd never cared. But this. It made no sense. There were no words in this. Painting titles that didn't matter. Where painted. When.

When the museum closed, she had to go. She walked out dazed into the city night. There were streets & traffic lights. She walked & walked.

Came to a great bookstore. It was a very tall castle of a structure, brown & grey stones, huge windows, she entered unseeing until she came to the art books on the fourth floor & found him again. The pictures. Her fingers moved across them like reading Braille. She longed to have known him, watched him paint, studied the hands that had made these, held his brushes, stretched his canvases, posed as his wheatstack or cathedral or water lily, soon her short skirt attracted a man, some man who sniffed & saw & sat near her & talked in words to her of these beautiful pictures & later to relieve the distress she now felt caring about something after long giving up, she rode his cock, didn't undress, wouldn't let him see her but he wasn't picky when her panties came off easily & rode him hard & moaned louder than he expected



& never opened her eyes, she wasn't here, she was riding him there, then, to him, not to fuck him, she was sure she'd have to wait in line for that, no, she was there along his long long days with many canvases in hand to catch the light as it moved & changed, *oh yes, she was now the light* as she grinded the man's cock now, his hands under her blouse, she kissed & bit, hard, too hard for fun & he would have retreated even from her tasty cunt but she squeezed him just right & rode harder *I am your light I am your light I am your changing light I am entering your eyes & shining your face o god o god o god o god o god*

& she came so hard he was injured, bent in ways how could such a slender girl but bent & it wasn't long then until the truck, *never saw her, I swear to almighty Christ I never saw her, never fucking saw her on my mother's grave—*

v.

The little heroes climbed together to the top of the mountain, helping each other up the harder parts of the path, admiring the trees & mushrooms & spider's webs along the way, encouraging each other that soon they would be on the very top, singing songs, & when they finally arrived at the summit, helping each other especially at the end when it was steep & rainy & the rocks hard to keep footing amongst, they smiled at each other & looked around at how it was up there & how little below could be seen & remarked to one another, "my what a cloudy day" & so it was that Mount Cloudy Day was named by these brave little heroes on that day—

vi.

As he remembers it better now than in awhile, his legs were going for a while. Not a thing anyone else would have noticed. Not the girls he fucked, two or three at a time toward the end. Did he have a quota to fill?

No, nobody could have known it. How the world around him was moving ferociously as he lagged. How he spent a lot of time looking up, for wings? A hot air balloon? Something.

The other option was a long dive down, not to return. Sure, maybe, possible.

Now, these years later, he sees the compromise he made, this chair he sits in. The world started making sense from his chair almost right away.

He'd told Jeremy most of this not long ago. A year, two? Not so long. Jeremy was 17, a gorgeous slender thing unaware his own possibilities. Nat was father enough, though not in blood, but he was Jeremy's template & deserved a word or two on this.

"So you could walk if you wanted to?"

"I didn't say that"

"Is it a punishment?"

"Not primarily"

Jeremy kneels down & hugs Nat, plainly, closely. The store is empty, nobody perusing its long aisles of magazines & newspapers, but it wouldn't matter. Their love is always present here, shines quietly.

Nat thought there might be more questions but there weren't. Jeremy was at college now, a day's drive away, their compromise, Jeremy would have stayed in Boston, Nat wouldn't have it.

“You’ll have more pussy in the next four years than ever again. You can’t be distracted by me”

“Nat!”

Nat was merciless.

“You fuck everything in sight you take a fancy to, that smiles twice & gives you a saucy wiggle. Don’t waste time chasing any of them. Let them knock at your door. Then wait. Make them knock twice.”

Jeremy nods & blushes. Well over six feet, easily handsome, he is small, tucked in a palm, when Nat advises, when Nat rants.

“Just make sure their hair is down & skirts are short if you bring them by the store.”

He nods. Nat enjoys looking. Does not flirt. Is no fool but requires a thorough glance at the goods of the ones Jeremy likes enough. Easy enough to arrange a good look since girls fall for Jeremy pretty hard.

Truth is, Jeremy would have pushed some of them wholly into Nat’s lap if it would have got him up & walking. Had more than one of them kneel before him if—

What about those two, Nat, walking in the door right now? Both of them blonde, the younger one scrubbed fresh as a daisy with a pink tint to her hair. Smells like sunshine shaped by a subtle hand—and the other? Would she be fun to hurt? A little? Maybe she would hurt you a little back, if you were lucky.

But the man with them, oh. Yes. Now he gets it. Tucks away his lustful play & waits.

Eventually they approach him in his lair back of the store.

“The game’s back there.” He points. Looking at the younger one. She studies his face for a moment, then turns to her companions. Christina & Kinley nod for her to decide.

“Through the Red Bag. The door.”

Maya blinks.

“You close your eyes, & imagine yourself on the other side of the door. Then you open your eyes.”

“And?”

“You’re there. The Tangled Gate.”

Maya is silent. They regard each other.

“This is what I do.”

“Give directions?”

Nat laughs, sees she is guileless. Points to the box in her hand.

“You’re the first to notice that box.”

She starts, looks at it. “How?”

“It’s OK, you’ll need it.”

“Do you know anything else we can use?” asks Kinley, stepping forward.

He frowns, thinks. “My life used to be simpler.” Looks hard at Kinley. “I’d sell newspapers & have really dirty fantasies about girls like these.” Pause. “Sometimes even have girls like these.”

“And now?”

He smiles, charming. “I sell papers, & give directions.”

“No more dirty fantasies?” smirks Christina.

He smirks back, in kind. Rolls his chair a couple of ways, to give them easy passage by him.

vii.

(When you walk through that door, or rather imagine yourself to the other side of it, maybe you will finally achieve the sense of a fibre knowing its weaving, no longer harried or just hanging on, knowing that everything needs you too & seeking to keep you your place, what a fine, happy knowing that would be, come on!)

(It's not so far, come on!)

viii.

Remember some things. This is the lost or obscured purpose of the Tangled Gate. You will enter as a group, pretty dancers offered as a sacrifice to the Beast within, but I alone know what you will find. I know the ways within better than all, I am the one the Architect gave the threads to.

The Architect loves me but cannot say it directly to me. He watches me dance with the rest, watches how I bend & move, does not know I move to please his notice.

The stories of what happened in the Tangled Gate are wrong. A sort of grand misunderstanding. Distortions & lies & stupid guesses.

I went with the Hero because the Architect would not claim me to my father. He came after me in a desperate flight, & brought his son who wanted me too & *would* have gone to my father with the Architect's intents! Not a bad boy & I was sorry he died. I . . . no, not that sorry. If not for him, the Architect would have come for me. On that island where I was left.

Not because the great Hero spurned me. I knew five minutes after I left with him that I was wrong. The other girls had a phrase: prick on a stick. They preferred that really. Suck it, fuck it, empty it one way or another, & the rest of it for you. The money, lands, whatever. Just don't sell short picking your prick.

He wanted me in his harem. They were all returning with him to the mainland, still not knowing what had happened.

Every seven years sacrifices had to be made to the Beast, a group of boy & girl virgins, trained as dancers, to be consumed.

Not this time. Because of me.

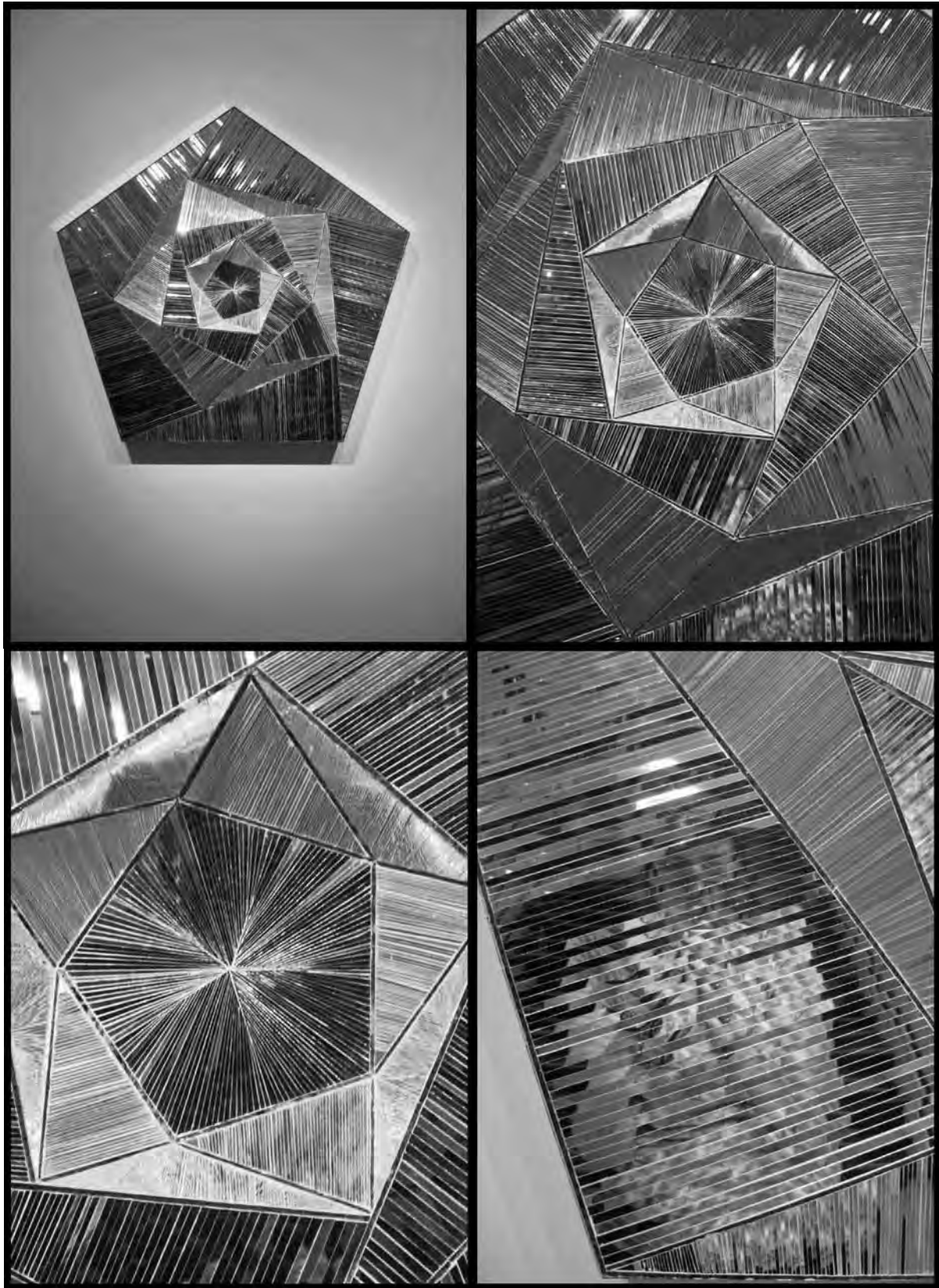
The previous time I had been a child, I had watched half-understanding what unfolded. I wasn't sure but I didn't like it.

Being the princess meant my own father indulged me. Living on an island limited my world of interests.

In short, the Tangled Gate caught my fancy. The King ordered the Architect to indulge all of my questions.

He did, with a smile. And I will say that I believed at first it was all necessary somehow. But, eventually, no, I determined to know better.

My mother told me little but when I first bled she gave me a talk to make up for the rest.



“Don’t lead with your heart, it will blind you.”

“What then?”

“Sniff.”

“Sniff?”

“When boys & men near you, learn to sniff. Let it lead your thoughts. Use the rest, but lead with your sniff.”

We never talked like that again but I used her advice. And learned: the Architect & his son both wanted me, the son more blatantly.

A wispy, arrogant boy, not quite a prick on a stick, but other girls fancied him. Rouged lips, lower cut clothing, tight, he consumed but kept me in view.

The Architect said nothing. Practically only looked at me in his deepest dreams. But he looked, he wanted, with the hunger of a man, not a boy.

I made him teach me about the Tangled Gate. How & why.

A Beast in there, & it seemed this Beast was the issue from my mother coupling with a bull, wearing the lady bull contraption the Architect built for her.

I laughed. “None of that is true.”

He started, nearly looked at me. Rough, flirty costumes? Not me. I was cruel.

“My mother fucked a mythical bull & had a half-man, half-bull beast that you locked up in the Tangled Gate built at the order of my father?”

One sniff told me his mind was licking inside my thighs, yearning to make me moan & release entirely to him. Still he was able to talk. *Ah beautiful.*

“Why would you doubt what I’ve told you?”

“And the sacrifice of virgins by the mainland? From a petty insult?”

He was biting my thigh, my ass, hard, owning me, hurting me to make me pay attention. *Oh yes.* I wasn’t even looking at him. I was at his spyglass that looked into the paths & complexities of the Gate.

“Tell me the truth. Or don’t you respect me enough to?”

He flinched. I think it was then I realized we loved each other. As improbable as this was, as much as not a word had been said of the sort. I was his only pupil & I spent all my days visiting him in his tower offices. I had seen all the maps. I knew the ins & outs better than anyone else.

“Tell me.”

He shook his head. He was scared. Not looking at me, studying a map, I was in his arms & he was scared.

“You didn’t build it.”

Silence. “No.”

“The Beast isn’t my mother’s son.”

Quietly. “No.”

“Does my father know?”

“No. I came ahead from the rest when we left the mainland. I told him later it would serve as a prison, an intimidating legend against those who would follow. He nodded. Trusted me.”

And does now with his daughter. *Ah yes.*

“And the Beast?”

“It’s his.”

“He lives in it?”

“No. I think it’s how he travels between worlds & times.”

“A portal?”

None of this made sense to me but I knew my father only cared about eventually taking back the mainland. He seemed to confuse the Architect with a necromancer who had turned what he once claimed was a simple, elaborate prison into something else. Fine. Saw my interest. Better than boys for now. Saving me for a strategic pairing.

And the Hero? The sacrifices? The Architect didn’t know what had happened to them the first time.

“They never came back?”

“No.”

“They were payments to my father for an insult?”

“Anything to keep him here.”

So here they come again but this time among them a Hero.
I sniffed. I knew.

I convinced the Architect to help them.

“If they survive, they can tell us about it. The Beast, what happens in there.”

He didn’t like it. I leaned in, breathed quietly. I waited.

“A thread.”

I nodded.

Then he showed me the box. A box of spooled threads. Different colors. I looked at him as he was gnawing my nipples so hard I winced into his eyes.

“Which color?”

“The White”

“And the rest?”

“There are different paths through, to different places.”

Undress me, hurry, I want to please you, I am ready, I want your hard heat in me, your desire so long past ready, take me, consume me, I will let you, & let you, & let you, & then I will take some too.

“When you lead them out—”

“I’m not going in?”

“When they’re coming out, I want you to go with them to the mainland. Leave here. Be with the one among they concealed to save the lot.”

I looked at him as my clothes immolated, as my torso fused to him in pain & love. I loved him. I was his. There was nothing else. No other truths to know.

“Why?”

“Just go. Go with him. There will be war & your father will lose.”

“You know?”

He nods at me. “He doesn’t listen.”

His voice falters. His love for me cracks open, plainly. “Go with him & direct him take you far. Far!”

So now you understand more than you did. I went because the Architect sent me away with the Hero & the dancers. The Hero considered me just one more pretty among many he had

liberated that day. With *my* thread.

I hurt him when he came for me. The Architect had given me a word when we parted. He was a necromancer in some ways, I suppose. I hurt the Hero when he came for me in my bed.

He left me on that island with some of his harem.

And the Architect continued to follow me, & took his son, who died in their flight. And this loss took my Architect from me thereafter.

I returned to the Island finally, eventually, & I took up my residence in the tower offices, & eventually I found the box of colored threads where the Architect had hidden them for me. Perchance I return.

Now you know all, Maya. Now you know.

And one more thing to tell. I will search these paths & corridors, I will roam time & space & dimensions, until I find him, for he isn't dead. He despairs his son but he lives still. *He loves me*. I will find him. I sniff & know this true.

ix.

Maya nods. She & the girl look at each other an extended moment.

"I'm looking for someone I love too. Someone I long for."

"Stay close by your friends, there are many kinds of puzzles & traps in here."

Maya nods, wants to ask more, does not. Realizes as she fades from this moment that it happened entirely while passing through the Red Bag into the Tangled Gate. She wondered if the others had gotten any warning or message.

(Christina found herself in a lovely simply adorned hotel room, her hair much longer & braided, as perhaps some lost day, & she is waking to a chilly room, a colder day outside, & it is her last day living here. And she is sad because this has been her home for years, she had come here from far away, a place lost, loved ones, questions—

(She has only a blue bag to travel with, its few articles in waterproof cases, & her departure is a matter of great sadness in the . . .

(Pensionne? Is that it? Yes. The Pensionne "for those lost" reads its sign as well. And she is leaving. Leaving countless faces & friends, high & low hours she has known here, to return far, miles & years crossed, to find him, he is there, through the Tangled Gate, still writing her songs in letters she no longer receives, the songs are how he keeps a part of her still in Clover-dale—the songs—what?—)

Kinley stands in a tower high above the Tangled Gate & a man behind him is talking & talking—

"I can't let her go in now, I can't. She's not ready. I will lose her. I love her. I will lose her."

And another voice. "You will lose her anyway. And, in truth, she isn't yours to lose."

"I will send her away with the rest."

"It will do no good. She spikes your blood. You will be dragged wherever she goes."

"But she will be safe."

"For awhile, yes."

(Christina feels the ocean pull her in deep as she leaps from the boat that brought her this close to the Island. She swims & swims, it is a long way, the blue bag weighs at her, tied around her waist, she swims strongly & a bit desperately. She swims until the rocks pull her in, accept her from the sea, if reluctance in all, she lands, she lays wet & breathing hard. Back.)

x.

Suddenly we come to & look around. I count. Two legs. Two hands. Two girls with me. My Christina. The other one. Maya.

This is about her, isn't it?

They're looking at me, Maya is directly, as she does, Christina slant & sneaky, as is her way.

I nod, the man, knowing. Shit. Speak slowly, hoping words invent themselves.

"We're here. I think this is what we've been coming to. This is what Wytner, Cloverdale, the White Woods, all of it, protects. This is the power."

Maya starts to wander away. I'm tempted to clap or whistle her stay. Desist.

"Hey" says Christina, reading my stress. Maya pauses. "Stay close." Christina smiles. Means it. Maya looks, nods. Waits.

Before us is a fountain, it is pointedly what one encounters on crossing the Gate. Its waters look fresh, enticing.

Christina kneels, I start. "Wait." She looks at me, waiting. I've been chasing you all my life, it seems, & here you are, & in my mind I am still chasing you. You wait some more.

"Kinley."

"It's here for us to drink but I don't think it's plain water."

They both look at me.

I make a leap. "Iconic Square." Words. "It's dosed."

Maya is curious now. "Will it hurt us?"

"No. It may actually be to help acclimate . . . er . . . visitors here. Smooth out the strange."

Christina almost laughs. I love her for the wrong & right reasons right now. Protect her, protect her, is that what I want to be doing, *protect her, protect her*—

She dunks her head in, impatient. Drinks. Her way of flirting. Maya looks at me, questioning. I nod. She drinks scoops in her hand. Drinks deeply.

I wait. Wait some more.

Christina nears me, I flinch.

"Relax. I'm clothed."

"We came here to free you."

"We're helping Maya too."

She's relaxing, smiling. Acclimating, whatever fucking word. Maya too. Why am I hanging back?

"All in, Kinley. I don't think it works otherwise."

I say nothing.

“Or you can wait here for us? You don’t have to come.”

I nod. Gesture & nod.

She wets my lips. Kisses me. Lets me drink from her hand. She smiles gently. Maya sits with me too, on the edge of the Fountain, they sit with me & I join them slowly. Thinking to myself: *Eleusis, sex, love, Eleusis, Clover-dale, Wytner, Red Bag, Eleusis—*

Gradually, I cohere. Start to look around, up. The sky is a kind of chalky grey, daytime, but not much else. No feel to the air, not cold or warm right now.

This fountain, yes, I’ve seen it before. Or very close. A deep basin on the edge, but within a complication of design. Find it hard to explain it to myself.

“Kinley”—Christina’s tone is playful. Waiting. Briefly I remember her body, its terrifying hungers. I nod within, stand.

“Well, we’ve drunk. So we’re in.” I look around. “Two distinct ways to go. Left or right.”

They look, they walk a little each way. They wait. Not usually girls without their own strong opinions, still, they wait for me.

Now I’m imagining them both nude & this pleases me. Maya looks tight, full of young demons to be broken.

They giggle. Shit. Telepathy. Or just girls being girls. Who the fuck can tell? I’ll have to keep my mind more focused. Yah, um.

xi.

—On that beach, sure, film it, leave me be—thank you—

I didn’t find you—not there, not here either—I wanted to ask you something—something important—I don’t know how I’d word it—maybe just bare my breast at you & growl—& know you’d know—

I sit in the waves finally—you tell me otherwise—you push your cameras right into the waves with me—ok then—but why follow me this far?

I don’t know more than you—I know this much—touch breast, growl—I remain in the waves until these leave me too—

“Can I offer you a towel?”

“Don’t you prefer a pose or a nude scene?”

He laughs. “You’re lovely. I haven’t earned it.”

“Is that how it works?”

“Most times, I suppose.”

“What’s your film called?”

“**RemoteLand.**”

I laugh.

“Silly, I know. I discovered its title in a dream of all places.”



"Dreams are a place?"

He stands. His limp flashes briefly in my mind. Ahh.

"It was a beach like this. There is a cow chained to the sand. A woman, you, are watching from over the hill, behind that small hill."

"What then?"

"Something emerges from the sea & the cow cries out, is swept back into the water."

"A monster?"

"I'm not sure. Something."

"Do I—does she—do anything?"

"No. You return the next night. You are unable to resist. You wish to be swept into the sea too."

I nod. This is why I've come.

"But—"

"But—?"

"He doesn't wish to consume you. He needs your help, will trade you favors."

I nod.

"He will love you as your husband no longer does."

"I don't have a husband."

"No. But you belong to a man."

Ahh. "In return?"

"Hm? O yes. In return you will let him enter your world via a story."

"A story?"

Nod.

"And where did the title come from? Where in this dream?"

"Oh, yes. It was a poem I wrote upon waking. I sat up, disoriented, grabbing around for a pen or pencil & a sheet.

*Neither death nor dream are truly
a remote land."*

"So you shortened it."

"I liked it better that way."

"Makes less & more sense both."

"Yes. I think so."

"Shall we then?"

"Then?"

"Film the scene?"

"You . . . would?"

"Here we are. It will give me a reason to button my blouse, comb my hair."

He nods. "You prefer I do neither?"

He nods again.

I smile. "Do you paint too?"

"No. But I can learn."

There are other stories to how she became the Gate-Keeper's lead actress in **RemoteLand**, but I prefer this one. I like the scene in the film which follows best. A few, increasingly rare few,

will keep part of it.

xii.

The next scene is important to every version of the film, even if it is not in all of them. It isn't.

She climbs to the tall castle on the taller hill, & remembers her father the King would roam its length in the weaker hours of the night.

"They're all out there"

I was small, sleepless too, in love with the night's shiny stones, musical patterns of birds in flight.

"Who?"

"The ones who would take all this. Our heritage & home." The Island seemed very quiet as he spoke on. I would embrace him as he said, "There are other weapons. Stranger strengths."

She looks at me. "Am I I or is she she?"

"Hm?"

"First or third person?"

"Does it have to be one or the other?"

"Shouldn't it be?"

"If you wish."

"Don't you?"

"Turn. In profile."

"OK."

My camera is still learning her. Strawberry blonde hair. My camera is used to the brunette. I insist. Green eyes too. And she is more slender.

"I began filming with you."

"OK."

"I couldn't with the other."

"Who?"

"My camera struggled with her & it was hard."

"Why?"

My camera begins to forget & flow with you, slowly, in dusky hours, but then you learn what to do more & more we roam your body in film & it is nicer & nicer in time—

I return to these places now & they are empty. I return & find everything I knew then decaying & silent. I am trying to understand.

He places cameras at every angle.

"What are you doing?"

"What?"

"Why so many?"

"To get all of you."

"You won't."

"I can try."

"You won't."

"I will try."

I nod.

I try to understand. The waking dreams would push me from my bed & I would come to my dancing grounds to . . . escape them? Communicate them?

"Which?"

"I don't know."

"It's your film."

"I'm the Gate-Keeper."

"It's not your film?"

"There's more to it."

I nod.

"Shall I continue?"

I nod.

I come to the dancing grounds & I let the waking dream move through me, move my feet through the set stones & raked sands, I sing its pictures & noise.

I am remembering the book he showed me, of various patterns, we would study them together like a language—

"Then others would come"

"Others?"

"In his court. They would come to my dancing grounds."

"To dance too?"

"To spy on me. To show off for him. It made them jealous my hold on him."

"You were the Princess!"

"One did me better. My friend but that didn't matter. She took to him & he was helpless."

She would dance every morning, soon after I had finished, & dressed, & disappear the remain of the day. My mother's witches & enchantresses & voodoo damsels could not conjure a response to that one—

"Who plays her? The brunette?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Just no."

"Can I choose?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"My film."

"My tits & ass you're filming."

"No."

"Really?"

"Really."

I agree. I'm glad. We're setting ground rules here. Good he's no pushover.

But I'll find other ways to break him, & beat her.

xiii.

"Cut!" says the Gate-Keeper.

"Cut?" she asks. Demands. Cut?

He nods. Smiles. "I know. Your ass. My film."

Offers me his hand, we walk to a bench aside the Dancing Grounds.

Tells me to wait. Returns with some clothes. Not fancy but I like them. He selected them himself.

I stand before him, shed my clothes, dare him a little. There is a pause. A passage of air.

He dresses me. There is humor & affection in his touch, his movements. A long shirt, black tights. No underwear. He insists black panties. Smiles. I weaken. He *must* paint.

Now dressed for him & strangely me too, I sit on the bench with him. He considers me. I wish my shirt was low cut.

"What?" I snap.

"You came when I needed you but I've explained nothing."

"The brunette knew?"

"No more about her," he says quietly. "I loved her. She left. The story continues."

"If she returns?"

"She won't."

I start to argue but, again, don't. He's not gaming me. Such the rare man who doesn't. I'm nearly forgetting.

I nod. "Explain to me then."

"It's a film but . . . isn't."

"You know I'm dead."

He laughs & for a moment I am afraid.

"It's not that easy," he says softly.

"Dying?"

"Remember my film's title? The dream?"

I nod, shivering.

"You were traveling a long time to reach the sea."

Nod.

"Do you remember any of it?"

"No."

"What do you remember?"

"The museum. Those pictures."

"Anything after?"

I shake my head.

"But you travelled, & you're in the surf & I'm filming you."

I nod. He takes my hand. Not prelude to a kiss or a grope or even an embrace. Just my hand.

“My origins are remote. And I’m not sure of everything. But this island is one of my sets.”

“How did I come to a . . . island?”

“You swam. From the mainland.”

“Is that far?”

“Many miles, I think.”

“Then how?”

“I’m not sure. Maybe you’re part fish,” barely smiling.

“So this is the land of the dead where you film?”

“No. This is my set.” He stands, not wishing or needing to explain more.

I nod.

He considers me. “I’ll assign you King’s consort.”

“Assign?”

He nods. “You’ll seduce him over time. Slowly drive him to war with the mainland.”

I stand. “But.”

His face softens for a moment. “Nights not with him you’ll spend with me of course.”

I want to say but don’t. *Really want to say* but don’t.

Then do. At least a little. “But why were you filming me before? Did I do badly?”

He turns to the water. “They’re still arriving. I had to block my shots.”

“They?”

Now his look is upon me. “When I don’t like the shot, I re-shoot it. When I don’t like the scene, I re-write it. When I haven’t cast correctly, I re-cast. You’re not the Princess. You’re the demon who destroys the King.”

“Why?”

“You’re not Maya. You’re not Christina.”

“Who are they?”

“I’m not sure yet.”

“I’m the demon.”

“Yes.”

“Who plays the King?”

He looks at me. His face red now. “You mean who do you fuck?”

I flinch inly but simply nod.

“It doesn’t work like that.”

“Do I really?”

“Fuck him? Yes. Many times. You cause him to lose his Queen, his daughter. His son dies in service to you.”

“Why?”

“That’s the story.”

“Re-write it. You said you could.”

“No. The story is the story.”

“But.”

Now he is angry. A man. This I can deal with.

“Can I say no?”



"You came here, to me. I'm not sure how it works, because each time is different, but you came here, & I had to decide."

"I'm not Princess material."

"No. You're angry, vengeful, in pain."

"Where's my script?"

"I told you what to do."

"What is my choice in this?"

He considers me quietly. "Do you wish to sleep in my bed some nights?"

I say "of course" with a force of desire only those paintings had ever made in me.

"You are the Princess's dear friend. You come to dance when she is done. Others come but the King watches you. You let him watch, perform for him."

"May I think of you?"

"I expect it."

"Where will the cameras be?"

"You won't see any."

"But, what about before?"

"Those were test shots. I have what I need."

"When will I see you?"

He smiles & takes my hand, kisses my fingers, touches them to his cheek. Points me toward the Castle. A flirty smack on my ass sends me on my way.

xiv.

Wait, you say. Wait! She isn't his leading actress? The demon is not the star of **RemoteLand**, you add.

The Gate-Keeper knew what he was doing. Knew Maya & Christina would pass through but not stay. What he needed from them was to establish the story, then she'd step in.

He needed to humble her some too. Her arrogance had gotten her a far piece, then failed her, then led her to this Island when most others would have nodded & let it go.

He needed to imbue this film with fanatical reserves of power, build its frame from hurricane & skybursts, his film with the endurance of centuries, adjust when need be, but keep along, with fantastical thrust, the minutes, the years, this story must live wild & varied in men's hearts, they must wonder at it, & not know, wonder & not know—

It must survive his times of absence, far far absence, while he pursued answers & allies—

Long before film was conceived, the Gate-Keeper began making the most important work of Art ever made—this film would defend the world against those who had constructed it & would one day move on, abandoning it—

Where was I from? Was I other than a man? I was from times long from here, I was indeed a film-maker. One of the first. How did I come here?

It was a man I met. He said he dreamed me. Dreamed & freed me.

No, none of that explains. Yes, she shall be my lead actress. But first, Maya, Christina.

She comes to me that first night. Learns which rooms in the Castle are genuine rooms, which are sets.

Having done what she could, she slips from the scene to find me. This one time, I let her.

She drives a kiss into me, her panic, her want, her half-belief she loves me as she'd loved the painter in his pictures, will not relax, has me down there in a painful grip will not loose, I tug, tug, & am inside her, deep, she gnaws at me & pulls me deeper in, smiles rawly at me, I am paralyzed as she rides me harder & harder, I am losing, losing, she lets a little & we ride together, mercy's sweetness, her kiss laps at me, more & more gently & I cum into her long & slow as she smiles long & slow—so slow—

So now you know.



To be continued in Cenacle | 85 | June 2013

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NEW ENGLAND

Notes on Contributors

Ric Amante lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. His poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. KD & I are pleased as pie to call Ric, Zannemarie Lloyd Taylor, & Joe Coleman neighbors. Ric has noted he is just one hop of the railroad tracks away!

Joe Ciccone lives in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts. His poetry last appeared in *The Cenacle* | 80 | April 2012. Doc Ciccone recently became a partner in his medical practice. And he baked up some good new poems. Good news all around!

Joe Coleman lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. His poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. His work grows steadily in its depth & fire as time goes on, as he struggles some days, prospers others.

Ralph Emerson lives in Glastonbury, Connecticut. His most recent language essay appeared in *The Cenacle* | 77 | April 2011. It is a fine, fine thing to have new writing from him in this issue, for it shows more than much else that he is on his beam & nicely strolling forth.

Ernest Hemingway was born in 1899 in Oak Park, Illinois, & died in 1961 in Ketchum, Idaho. He is the author of such classic 20th century novels as *The Sun Also Rises* & *A Farewell to Arms*. His story in this issue was also reprinted as a volume in the 2003 Burning Man Books series: <http://www.scriptorpress.com/nobordersbookstore.html>.

Judh Haggai lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Her meditations on death in this issue are some of her finest work. More of her work can be found online at: <http://tribes.tribe.net/poetryjams>.

Nathan D. Horowitz lives in Vienna, Austria. His poetry & prose appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. His piece in this issue forms part of his work-in-progress *Nighttime Daydreams*. More of his work can be found online at: <http://www.scribd.com/Nathan%20Horowitz>.

Abraham Hafiz Rodriguez lives in Peoria, Illinois. His essay in this issue is his first in the pages of *The Cenacle*. Earlier this year, Abe spent an epic phone call introducing me to the work of Dr. Judy Wood regarding 9/11. He convinced me thoroughly that her conclusions on the matter bear more validity than any other set of ideas I have heard. More of his writings on 9/11 & other topics can be found at: <http://pookzta.blogspot.com>.

Tom Sheehan lives in Saugus, Massachusetts. His writing appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Tom's long poem in this issue is amazing, a classic piece of writing that floored me upon reading, & since. Thank you, Tom.

Kassandra Soulard lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. It is foremost to her credit that I sit composing these lines in Bungalow C. Like Mrs. Potter on *M*A*S*H**, she wanted her own wall to hammer a nail in. She now has quite a few. Success!

Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. Strange, I already know so many dear ones in this town, & it was here that Hartlee & I spent so many nights long ago on strange, lovely journeys through entropy unto Resurrection, Now. Hoping he walks through that door one day soon.

Ted Widmer was born in 1963 & is an historian, writer, & librarian. He served as a speechwriter in the later days of the Clinton White House. The full text of his interview with R. Crumb can be found at the *Paris Review* website.

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Someday
Time
will die,
and
Love
will
bury it.

--Richard Brautigan

